Tasogare-iro no Uta Tsukai Volume1

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These are the illustrations included in the first volume of Tasogare-iro no Uta Tsukai.

黄昏色の詠使い
イヴは夜明けに微笑んで

彼女は、ずっと考えていた。人と関わらず、孤独な人生。それで、いいのかと。

だから、決めたのだ。自分の“心”を形にして詠み出せる、名詠式を学ぶことを。そうすれば、少しでも彼に……何かを伝えられるかもしれないから——。

『Keinez』・『Ruguz』・『Surisuz』・『Beorc』・『Arzus』—— この五色を基本に、呼びたいものと同じ色の触媒を介し、名前を讃美し、詠うことで招き寄せる名詠式。その専修学校に通うクルーエルは、年下の転校生で、異端の夜色名詠を学ぶネイトに興味を抱く。一方、学校を訪れた虹色名詠士・カインツもまた、夜色名詠の使い手を探していて……!?

第18回ファンタジア長編小説大賞佳作受賞作。“君のもとへ続く詠。それを探す”召喚ファンタジー。

黄昏色の詠使い
イヴは夜明けに微笑んで
細音 啓

富士見ファンタジア文庫

イラスト 竹岡美穂

174-1
¥580

イヴは夜明けに微笑んで
細音啓
富士見ファンタジア文庫

「ボクと勝負しないか？」

―― 始まりは、あの日交わした、一つの約束――

「……もし完成したら、
一番最初に見てくれる？」

黄昏色の詠使い

イヴは夜明けに微笑んで

「わたし……
あの子の傍にいてあげたい」

約束は想いとなり、その想いを

少年と少女は詠(うた)にして紡ぐ。

「僕はきっと詠(よ)べる。
この想いを伝えられる」

だから、約束の名が詠ばれる。
それこそがイヴ――夜の真精にして〈始まりの女〉

あとがき

ネット達に出会ったのは '06年の6月でした。
もはや他人とは思えません。

どうぞ可愛いがってやって下さいませ――！

竹岡美穂

http://www.nezicaplant.com/

Prologue : The Intersection of Rainbow and Night —Even before the beginning—

Part 1

The scorching sunlight shone like torture. Even closing the curtains could not block the heat wave. The window frames were tinged with enough heat that even a light touch could burn one's hand.

Outside the classroom, the schoolyard was filled with dancing waves of heat. It was too warm to be called early summer. No, at this stage, it would be more appropriate to call it "hot".

……The school should reasonably consider installing air conditioning equipment.

The electric fan on the ceiling spun vainly. Giving it a sidelong glance, the teacher, Jessica Levindear let out a tired sigh. Was it because of the heat or because of the summer vacation drawing closer?

Gazing down from her platform, the students were all lying paralyzed on their desks. The combined test before summer vacation had ended, and right now was certainly the most careless class period.

“By the way, has everyone decided what color to specialize in?”

Using her hand to wipe away the sweat sticking to her bangs, Jessica crossed her arms. Descending the platform , she stepped up to the student sitting in the front row.

“Zessel-kun, what about you?”

She patted the shoulders of a sleeping student whose body swayed like a rowing boat. Opening his eyes, the student in question scratched his head as if he was flustered.

“S-Stop that, sensei! Didn’t I already choose Red?!”

Hiding his embarrassment, the student’s cheeks flushed and he replied in a loud voice.

“I knew you would say that. Zessel-kun has always liked red, haven’t you?”

"Isn't it the most eye-catching color? Fire, the use of that Recitation is extremely cool."

Behind the student who was gesturing with his hands while he spoke-

"Still haven't learned your lesson? Even though you say that, you got burned the last time you reached your hand into a fire."

The glasses-wearing student sitting behind Zessel taunted. Giggles and laughter erupted from every corner of the classroom.

"Well then, what color does Mirror-kun want to do?"

Jessica inquired, in order to prevent the dispute between the two from starting. While adjusting the position of his glasses, the student spoke.

"'Life is the ocean contained within the body.' I choose Blue, because life is born from water. To be able to create objects from that water, I think that has an extraordinarily deep significance."

Mirror-kun, even though you say that, you nearly drowned in a swimming pool before. Hiding the wry

smile in her heart, Jessica turned to look at the girl sitting behind him.

“Enne, what about you?”

“M-Me?”

Answering in a flustered voice, the embarrassed girl’s face reddened.

“Yes. What color do you want to specialize in studying ?”

“I-I want…… White…… because I want to call out Pegasus……”

The Winged Horse, also known as Pegasus, was part of White Recitations. However, it had a considerably high level of difficulty. Although Enne was a quiet and introverted girl, she set firm objectives for herself. In fact, in this time’s combined exam, her grades were at the top of the class.

“Enne will definitely be able to Recite it. That feeling is important. ‘Wanting to Recite’ is the most important feeling towards improvement.”

After seeing the blushing girl nod her head, Jessica asked the same question to other students in the class.

By the time there was only one student left unquestioned, there were the most voices that chose Red, and the second most was Blue. Third place, with about an equal number of students choosing each, were Green and Yellow. Conversely, not many voices chose White. This could be called a typical ranking in middle schools.

—Now, there was only one person remaining. However…… this person is where the problem lies.

The other students understood this, and a commotion started in the classroom.

Jessica looked at the girl who sat in farthest back end of the classroom. She had shoulder-length jet black hair, and a slender body figure.

“Evhemary, you choose…… that…… that one, right?”

“Yes.”

Evhemary. The girl who was called out agreed in an extremely matter-of-course way.

"The one I want is the 'Night Color'."

After she said that, simultaneous laughter rose from the girl's surroundings.

"Wow, it's still the same signature phrase!"

"She's still saying that, stubborn Evhe-chan."

Anyhow, some students chatted in a loud voice while others laughed with their friends. Although the responses varied, what they had in common was that they marked Evhemary's words as foolish.

"That's enough, everyone quiet down a bit."

After the noisy classroom calmed down, Jessica once again turned to look at Evhemary.

"……Hey, Evhemary, don't you have any interest in the other colors?"

"None."

The girl blinked slightly. Such a Recitation color wasn't a part of the high school's color choices. In other words, such a Recitation color didn't exist in the world.

—Elfand Recitation School. That is the school's official name.

As the name suggests, mastering the art of 'Recitation Skills' is the goal of students in this school. Recitation, that is, to sing the name of a companion. Sketch in your heart what you want to create, the object you want to encounter, then praise that name and invite the object to your side. It is that kind of skill. Its distinctive feature is ' Color Classification'.

In the natural world, all the 'colors' that can be distinguished by human eyes are, to be precise, waves of visible light. In other words, materials with the same color become the same wavelength of light energy. To sum up, Recitation is the art of transmitting an object by using this common energy.

Red Blue Yellow Green White
Keinez, Ruguz, Surisuz, Beorc, Arzus.

In general, Recitation consists of five colors. Four colors are from the seven that form the foundation of visible light. After including White, these five colors add up to the existence of Recitations.

Currently, except for these five colors, there are no other colors in existence. Even if researchers all around the world challenge this, establishing a color other than the five is impossible.

But even so, this girl has not changed her opinion since she entered middle school. She insists that there is a Night Color Recitation.

"……I see. But, to clearly understand what you want to do is great, Evhemary."

Even though she was made fun of in the middle of class, this girl wasn't perturbed. If she were to be evaluated only by this situation, she would be considered mature. However, the fact that she absolutely never changes her ideas makes her seem somewhat childish. In general, she is hard to predict.

Just what are Night Color Recitations? The homeroom teacher had asked her about it many times, but the girl has only given irrelevant answers.

The bell signaling the end of fifth period resounded in the classroom.

The end of the last class caused Jessica to sigh. The reason was that she no longer had to endure the heat in the classroom which felt like it made her body melt, and she didn’t have to deal with this girl again.

"Class is finished. I also have a meeting today. Because I have to go now, there is no homeroom. Other than the students on cleaning duty, everyone else is dismissed. On duty today are Evhemary and Biye."

At the end of the school day, the class suddenly became noisy to prepare for leaving the classroom.

Part 2

A silent, absolutely quiet classroom. Only the bell that announced the end of the school day vibrated in eardrums, only the hot setting sun that shone through the window covered the field of vision.

The broom swept broken, rusted nails into the wooden cabinet.

With her untied hair flowing in the gentle breeze, the girl, alone, gazed at the scenery outside the window.

—Wow, it's still the same signature phrase!

—She's still saying that, stubborn Evhe-chan.

Always.

It's always like that.

Always laughed at, always looked down on. By her classmates and her homeroom teacher…… No, everyone she sees around her is always laughing at her, and then leaving abruptly.

"……It's not a lie."

She sighed and muttered. She didn't feel regretful. She had grown used to the abuse and scorn a long time ago.

She didn't care if nobody understood. She understood that wishing for the acceptance of others was wrong.

She slowly walked towards the corner of the classroom , facing the window with fluttering curtains.

"—What a beautiful sunset."

She was on the second floor of the school. However, she wasn't gazing down from a very high place. But even so, the girl liked the scenery she saw from this window.

It was a dazzling, radiant sunset, blessing the people it shone on. —The 'Night Color' that she pursued was the complete opposite.

……Yes, surely, she admired it because she wasn't able to achieve it.

But. Even so, I—

The touch of a sudden, gentle breeze caused the girl to close her eyes.

A comforting wind that swept away the heat of the setting sun.

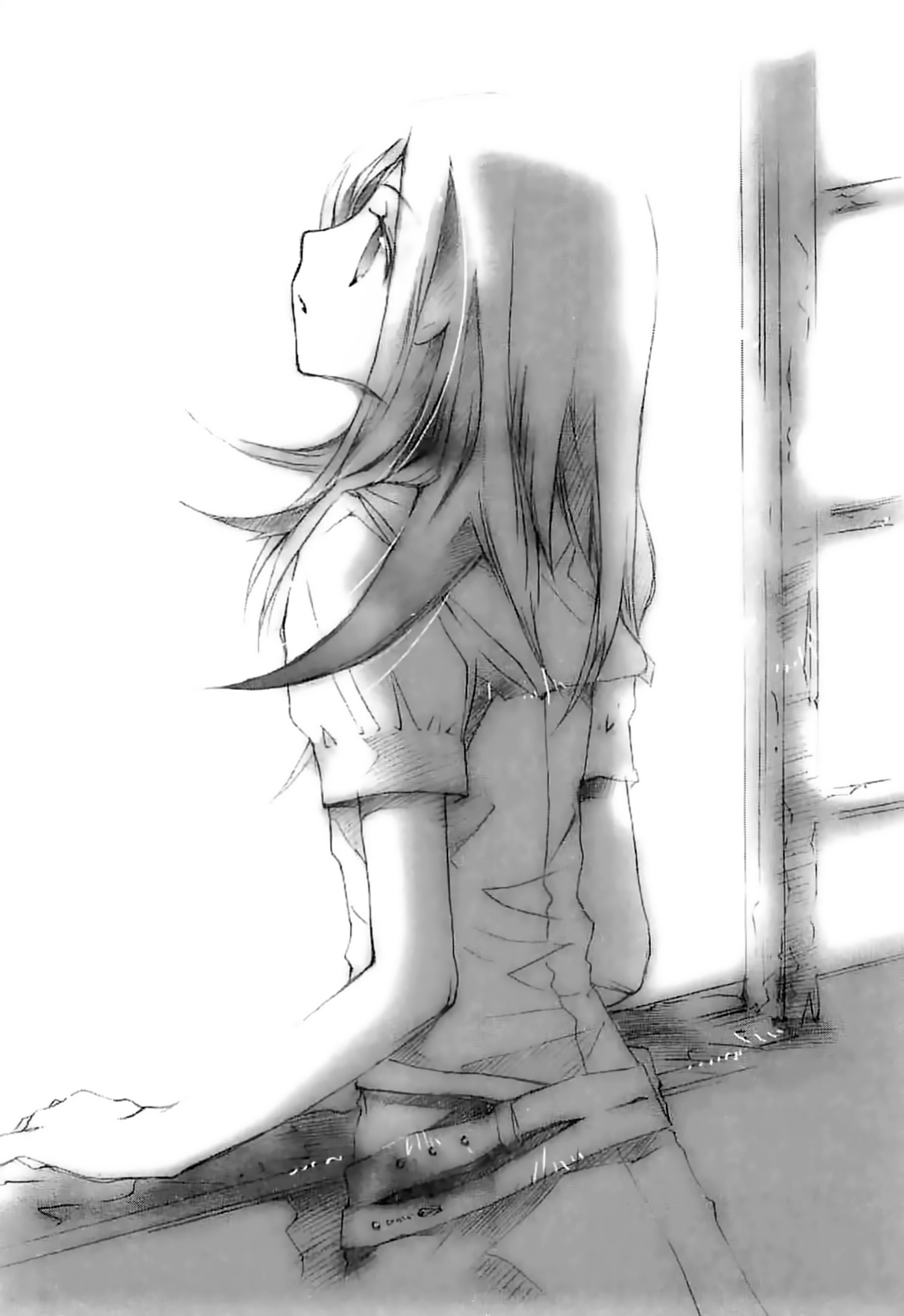
For a brief while, she entrusted her body to the wind……

Let's ring the bell of the Color of Night
[—Isa Yer she riena xeoi pel]

Muttering to herself, the girl let out a sigh.

I love (desire) only you
[miqvy elmei nehhe virgia-c-fifsia]

Well, not really a sigh.



Dancing in the twilight breeze, was a song.

For this reason, do you quietly cry alone?
zette ovan Yer be zarabearc solituqs

Not existing anywhere, Until evening (the small you), In this night (place) you (I) are in solitude (alone)
Lears neckt ele ravience Shadir Isa jes qusi xin fears toga peg ilmei shel

That melody is the music (tremor) of the soul, The tone quality (dance) of tears
jes kless qusi medolia lef cirkus, medolia lef zarabel

It drenches the world, Because it is a drop (song) of the frozen (beloved) night
Hir sinka I, bekwist WeR muas ririsia harmone lef twispel

Let the Night Color's woven song (oath) come to you
Yer she saria stig lef xeoi peg pel

O forgotten child, Come, O child who has been born
U da lostasia dremren boema foton doremren

Welcome back to the midst of slumber (cradle)
O univa sm thes hypne

And then I —
ende Years besti……

The song's ending verse was about to be sung, but the girl suddenly stopped the singing. Closing her mouth, the girl slowly turned around.

"……I wanted to listen until the end."

In the originally empty classroom, a familiar boy now sat in the seat directly behind her.

"It was a serene song. Even though the melody was somewhat sad, it was more delicate and lovely than any song I've heard before. Did you compose it?"

……I don't need to tell you. Because responding to that would be troublesome, the girl immediately turned so that her back faced him. However—

"Hey, Evhemary. Are you able to construct a theory?"

At those words, the girl unconsciously stopped her footsteps.

"Theory?"

When the girl ignorantly repeated that, her companion raised one eyebrow. “The Night Color Recitation. You can’t be proceeding according to an existing color?”

“There’s no point in telling you that kind of stuff, Xins.”

Xins Airwincle. Among the class, he was not a particularly attention-catching student. His grades were average in his year of students. Although he had many friends, his social position wasn’t good enough to be class representative. It was only her second or third time talking to him like this.

“You’re pretty unsympathetic.”

Having hair the color between brown and gold, the boy shook his head slightly. The girl moved her gaze away from him and stared at the object in his hand.

“I thought Biye was on cleaning duty with me today. Why are you here holding a broom?”

“I’m here on his behalf. It’s because he’s in charge of making a speech tomorrow. He’s currently working on it in the library. But I seem to be a step too late; you’ve finished all the cleaning.”

Xins carelessly flung aside the broom. Putting his hands on the window frame, he faced the outside and shrugged his shoulders. Speaking of which, she had no intention of chatting with him like this.

“You’re done talking? Then, I’m going home.”

Quickly saying that over her shoulder, she prepared to leave.

But even before the girl had said that, the boy had been fixedly staring at her.

“What do you plan to use as a catalyst?”

—Catalyst?

A catalyst is a necessary, indispensable tool in Reciting . For the sake of performing a wavelength exchange in Recitations, it is an alternate material. Because it is used in famous Recitations, a catalyst is also required for Night Color Recitations. This boy is asking ‘what catalyst will you be using’, but…

“Why do you care about that sort of thing?”

Up until now, most of the questions people have asked are ‘What are Night Color Recitations?’ About the progress of the theory construction and details of using a catalyst material, not even the homeroom teacher has asked about them.

After saying that, the questioning girl shifted her gaze to one side and the boy crossed over to the windowsill, pointing downstairs.

“The results of the latest combined examination are posted in the central hallway of the first floor. The excellence list of the combined five subjects has your name on it.”

The five subjects refer to the five Colors of Recitation. From the Recitation’s catalyst list, to the famous Recitation experiment success stories, to having to solve a question with a mistaken guess. Not clearly indicating the range, normally Recitation tests whether you have enthusiasm and potential.

“What about it?”

“Not only that, but you are also first place in our whole school year.”

"Luck is scary, isn't it?"

At that moment, he raised the corners of his mouth.

"That's not correct. You forgot in order to 'deliberately lower your score'."

As if it contained poison, his tone of voice hardened. He still looked out the window, facing the school building's campus. Despite this, from his indirect stare came a sharp, pressuring sensation.

"As long as you have those thoughts, you will always get that kind of score. Although you usually deliberately suppress your score, you forgot to do that on this test. Am I wrong?"

"It's a joke. Being overestimated whenever I wish would only bring me trouble. How could a person do such a mysterious thing?"

Although she replied that, the boy's expression did not waver. He had expected that kind of rebuttal a long time ago – in his opinion, there was nothing that could have made him angrier – his companion acted like a wise old god.

"But isn't there one? Actually, I also acted like that."

"……You?"

"By the way, in my case, I solved half of the questions and left the other half of the paper blank when I submitted it. Although the teacher sometimes asked me about it, dodging the question is very easy."

—I don't understand the meaning of this. For what purpose…?

"Hm? I think, my reasons are probably the same as yours."

"……Same as mine?"

"Before the year-end tests, if your scores rank among the top you will be scouted by the royal research institute ."

Before his companion had urged him, the boy willingly continued speaking:

"You would certainly have a stable future, but going to the high school's research institute would mean becoming an assistant to your superiors. To put it

crudely, doing odd jobs like a servant. I asked to be excused from that kind of restricting lifestyle. I think you also hate that aspect.”

His white school uniform was dyed red by the sunset – Realizing that she was staring at the boy, Evhemary changed her gaze.

……Before she knew it, her heartbeat had become louder.

Feeling the illusion that the beating of her heart would reach the boy, Evhemary forcibly pressed down on her chest.

If she hadn’t done that, she felt that the boy would look inside her chest and see through the illusion.

“In other words, you would abandon the peaceful future you wanted to accomplish? But when Night Color Recitations are concerned, you don’t believe it’s real?”

“……In the end, what do you want to say?”

Slowly, he turned his gaze back around.

Until now, what the girl had been waiting for were these words. That sort of tone of voice.

"Just like how you want to become the Reciter of the Night Color, I also have my goals."

His facial expression changed from mischievous to shy and bashful – he showed an expression not usually displayed in the classroom.

Gazing into that, she remembered a strange feeling that even she could not understand.

'Just like how you want to become the Reciter of the Night Color.'

Because when he declared that, he had no scornful look in his eyes.

The friends and teacher in the class, everyone up until now, had all been unable to overlook that fact and showed a bitter smile. However, this boy did not do that.

—You, do you really believe what I said?

Up until that moment, everyone should have thought of her as troublesome. Slowly, little by little her heart rate sped up. It was not an unpleasant heartbeat, but a calm and gentle pulse.

“You said you have a goal…… What did you mean by that?”

Through dry lips, she uttered those words with difficulty.

“Oh, it looks like you are finally interested.”

“……It’s okay if you were just acting superior.”

“Ah. Wait, wait!”

When the girl was about to turn around and leave, he held back a wry smile while answering in a flustered manner.

“What I’m aiming for is Rainbow Color Recitation.”

“Rainbow Color?”

It was a word she had never heard of before, and she unintentionally repeated it.

"Yeah. Unlike you, I don't wish to construct a new Recitation. Keinez (Red), Ruguz (Blue), Surisuz (Yellow), Beorc (Green), Arzus (White). When these five colors are combined, don't they resemble the colors of a rainbow? That is my goal."

"How reckless."

Sighing once, she gave an exaggerated shrug of her shoulders.

She never thought that he was going to say a crazy thing like that.

In general, simply learning one Color of Recitation would take more than a decade. Even if he did learn Red, the essentials of the next color, Blue, are completely different. This is the distinctive feature of Recitations.

Recitations can be summarized to be called one field of study; however, the theory system of every single color is completely different. Just as he said 'To construct a theory, you can't be planning to copy an existing color?' Those words, of course, also include that meaning.

Even if you did spend ten years to learn a color, your physical strength and mental agility would become weak afterwards. In the current condition, mastering three colors is the limit.

“Even if you succeeded in doing that, you would already be a grandfather by that time.”

She teased with a smile.

“Will I? I think that it’s just as challenging as your goal .”

“I won’t become a grandmother. By that time, I would already be dead.”

She retorted with those words—

……Oh no.

Evhemary immediately regretted her words.

……How could I have said such a foolish thing?

The words that she didn’t intend to say to anyone, she said it due to an impulsive feeling.

Evhemary knew that her facial expression had become pained and warped. Because she lost her self-control, she couldn't even hide this kind of expression.

"Evhemary…… you weren't serious, were you?"

He glanced back at the front.

She wanted to avert her eyes, but there wasn't a way to do so. Even every movement of her body was pinned down by the young man's eyes. It was like a sharp knife. It was impossible to pull out, and on the contrary, would instead cause serious bleeding.

If only it was a lie. Moreover, the girl was clearly penetrated by the lie, so the boy probably wouldn't continue to question her any further.

But even so—

"For generations, my family has had weak health. Every person has had a short life. Even my mother quickly passed away after giving birth to me. ……I am definitely the same. I have never thought like you, to learn all five Colors of Recitation."

Before she was aware of it, those words escaped from her lips.

They contained no lie, nor concealed her heartfelt words. She was unable to stop herself from talking.

—Because it was the first time.

The boy in front of her eyes listened attentively without speaking a word.

No matter whether it was about Recitations or personal matters, the boy was the first person to earnestly listen to her.

The students in the class, the homeroom teacher, and surrounding adults. They had all taken her words as the delusions of a child, and none of them took her seriously. But this boy—

"……To be honest, I already have a disease. I already don't have much more time left. So at least, before the very end, I want to accomplish something."

That's right – Recitation is my goal.

Unexpectedly, his gaze wavered slightly.

……Idiot. I was too honest!

How ironic. It was because of his actions that she realized her eyes were wet.

—I, I wonder why I'm crying. Is it due to sadness?

Wrong. What kind of feeling is this? Usually, I would definitely not cry in this type of situation.

Letting out a small breath, the girl wiped the corner of her eyes with the sleeve of her school uniform.

"You just asked me whether my theory construction is completed or not, right? About half of it is already in my mind. The catalyst and the channel direction are part of it . But so far, it seems like an illusion."

After she wiped away the tears that flowed down, her companion turned his gaze back around.

"Evhemary, is it okay if I ask you one question? …… You, what do you want to call out from the Night Color Recitations?"

"It's a secret."

Before he had time to react, the girl burst out in melodious laughter. It wasn't a forced smile of triumph, but a natural smile that Evhemary showed to the boy.

"Hey, do you think there is enough time?"

He didn't answer with 'enough time for what?'

"Do you think that in the time I'm alive, I can accomplish a Recitation that nobody has ever done or seen before?"

She took a step closer to the boy.

In the end, he was the same as her. Unable to lie, with his feelings immediately shown in his expression.

The boy understood that agreeing without any hesitation would signify pity. Because he understood this , he couldn't simply nod his head, but also couldn't deny it.

Unable to nod but also unable to shake his head, time passed—

"Want to compete with me?"

He suddenly blurted out those words.

"……Eh?"

"Before you complete Night Color Recitations, I will already have become proficient in five colors. After twenty years... No, I will complete it within ten years. So you also have to promise me, in our lifetimes, let me see you complete Night Color Recitations."

It was impossible to become proficient in all the Recitations within a ten-year period. The person who spoke those words should know the difficulty of it better than anyone else.

……Very stubborn.

This boy is undoubtedly an idiot, a stubborn idiot that no medicine could treat.

Evhemary desperately held back a smile.

—But, I don't hate this kind of hot-headed challenge, because I am like this also.

She stifled those words down to the depths of her heart.

“If we finish……”

Before she continued to talk any further, she felt something well up in the pit of her stomach.

The inside of her throat felt hot and bitter.

It was because I cried. Just after she thought that, she felt tears once again flowing down her cheeks.

……Can I be the first person to see it?

After seeing the boy nod, the girl once more wiped away her tears.

***

It was a far, distant future. But—

The two who made the promise each advanced in a contrasting direction.

One of them succeeded in completing a challenge that was done for the first time in the world at only twenty years of age. His reputation instantly spread across the entire world, and already achieved divinity while he still alive. So far, the number of people who volunteered to become his disciple surpassed one hundred in only a year.

The other one also attempted to become the first to try something never-before-seen in the world.

However, nobody knows whether it succeeded, and nobody is aware of whether her goal was achieved. Nobody went to become her apprentice, and her reputation did not spread throughout the world.

Wandering a world which nobody's eyes could perceive, she disappeared somewhere in the continent.

1st Play: Etude of Red and Night

Part 1

"Hey Kululu, have you decided which one to choose?"

Mio, in one corner of the general store, inquired loudly to the opposite corner of the room.

……Really, I could hear her fine even without the loud voice!

Kluele Sophi Net, the friend who trotted forward and gave Mio a half-reproaching look, shook her head.

The store was not very big, and there weren't many people. After shrugging her shoulders, Mio showed off the emerald-green drawing paper held in her left hand.

"Hey, I've decided to use this one. Don't you think the size is perfect?"

She gazed with moss-green eyes similar to the color of the paper. Mio Rentia — a girl with characteristic petit size who possessed an adorable doll-like face. Although

she was also sixteen years old, the impression of her exterior appearance and her carefree tone of voice made her look one or two years younger.

"I'm still worried, but drawing paper is an alternate option for me."

"I think drawing paper is wonderful. After you're done, you can bring over the origami."

With an innocent smile, Mio swung her short blonde hair.

"Are you going to use the frog paper that you called out to make origami……? I think that one's kind of bad. It feels like it will become sticky."

"Then, which one does Kululu want?"

That is where the problem lay. Kluele pretended to brush away the long hair that started to stick to her face and moved her gaze away from Mio, who questioned in an annoyed voice.

In the Recitation school that the two attended, there were only four days left until the recital contest assembly .

Recital contest – a competition where every student Recited, and called out the best object they could. Famous Reciters were invited as judges for this great event.

To students of their grade, most have the attitude of simply joining the fun. However, to students wanting to graduate, it is an important occasion that influences career choices.

“Mm, let’s just use this one.”

After hesitating for a long time, Kluele picked up a tube of red paint from a merchandise display basket.

“Eh… This kind of paint is commonly used in school!”

Mio puffed up both of her cheeks in an unsatisfied manner.

When entering high school, every student chose the color that they would specialize in. Mio chose Green, and Kluele chose Red. In the upcoming recital contest, students must use their specialized color to Recite. The problem was what to use as a catalyst.

Just like how Mio chose a green paper to use as a catalyst, the circumstances for a Red-color Recitation was the same. In brief, as long as the material was red, it could function as a catalyst.

As a result, Kluele chose red paint – However, Mio felt disappointed by this fact.

"It's only because I always use it, that I can feel at ease using that. There will be a lot of people coming to watch, right? If I fail or can't call out anything, I will feel humiliated."

"Mm, what you say is right. However, don't you feel like you're missing something?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders…… Mio sometimes fusses over strange points.

"It doesn't matter. After all, I still can't call out anything truly extraordinary."

Glancing at her incessantly complaining friend, Kluele continued to walk towards the front sales desk.

"Hurry up. After we leave, we are still going to check answers for tomorrow's schoolwork, right? If you keep hesitating, isn't that such a waste of time?"

"But I always think……"

Kluele grabbed the arm of the girl with the puffed up cheeks and dragged her outside.

"Stop complaining, let's hurry and go back."

***

They walked down a path to which the end couldn't be seen. After walking for almost half an hour, their destination finally appeared.

Tremia Academy. It is the Recitation school attached to the Tremia research institute, and is widely known as one of the very best schools in the world. With consistent courses from junior high school all the way to senior high school, its facilities and equipment by far exceed other large-scale schools.

“Kululu, I was thinking……”

Using her arm to hold the folder of paper against her body, Mio came closer while talking in the tone of a spoiled child. At this time, most people could probably guess her next words.

"It’s too troublesome to return home. Tonight, can I stay at Kululu’s place?”

Sure enough, it was the same as before.

“Fine, fine. But you have to help me cook!”

Kluele raised the shopping bags that she held in the air to substitute for a nod of her head. Kluele was originally a student from another country. For the chance to go to Tremia Academy, she is now living alone in the academy dormitory. Every day, Mio commutes to school from her own house, but the round trip easily takes over four hours. Therefore, if it is too late in the evening, she would usually spend the night in Kluele’s room.

“……But, why is it this hot?”

Mio, who was walking beside her, complained futilely. Tiny beads of sweat appeared on her forehead.

"Because it's summer."

Because she didn't know how to respond, Kluele also stated the obvious, most certain fact.

It wasn't that she didn't understand Mio's mood. The asphalt road attracted the heat of the sun, and burned their feet through the soles of their shoes. Occasionally, excessively dry wind blew, which parched their throats after breathing it in.

In fact, she also wanted to wipe the sweat off of her forehead, but because of the shopping bag in her hands, she had to repress the urge. In comparison, Mio still had one free hand and used it to take out a hankerchief.

"But, what makes me happy is that summer vacation is coming up. Does Kululu have any plans?"

—After thinking about it for a few seconds, the faces of her parents appeared in her mind.

"I will probably go back to my hometown. Although I have sent letters, without seeing me in person, they can't feel at ease."

"At ease? That's true, of course your parents will worry."

"But I'm already sixteen years old. They still worry so much about me, but don't they ever wonder if it's annoying?"

The two continued chatting while walking towards the shadow of a tree by the roadside. The feeling of wearing clothes soaked in sweat was very uncomfortable.

……It was a mistake to wear such a thick jacket, wasn't it?

Kluele wore long pants on the bottom half of her body. Because she didn't like to wear skirts, there was nothing she could do about it. However, she should have worn a blouse instead.

"Are your parents worried about your grades?"

Mio grinned mischievously, while at the same time observing Kluele's expression.

"How did Kululu do on this time's combined test? Didn't you say that you failed the guessing questions?"

"Ah… Don't ask me about that!"

As if trying to escape, Kluele turned so that her back faced the girl at her side.

Before the vacation, a combined test had been held. Out of the combined one thousand six hundred people in four grades, Kluele's score ranked one thousand three hundred seventy. Out of the four hundred and one people in her same grade, she ranked two hundred and fifth. The guessing questions that she had practiced with her friend the day before the test were all useless. She practically handed back a blank exam paper. The people in the ranks below her had pretty much the same situation.

……However, even though she had said it like that, after the scores were announced, in the classroom crying piteously beside her was only the girl currently at her side. Mio had been smiling only before she received her school report.

"How did Mio do on the test?"

"Me? About the same as last time, I just barely made it into the top one hundred. Compared to the people in my grade, I'm ranked second!"

"Wow, you traitor! The same as last time? How are you able to do so well?"

Because it was so unexpected, Kluele couldn't help but raise her voice. However, the girl in question had an aloof expression on her face.

"Eh? Because the questions this time were really easy. All you had to do was to remember the color reactions in our textbook to get three questions correct."

……But I remember that the textbook was a lot thicker than a dictionary!

Even though Mio spoke in a relaxed voice, she was probably the only first-year student who had read that book from start to finish.

"Hey, it's because if I don't do well, I won't get as much pocket money."

"……Next time, you have to treat me to dinner."

Really, what a sly person.

Half amazed, Kluele turned her head away. Even though she did that, Mio immediately circled in front of her and stared intently into Kluele's face.

"But I really did read the book. Because I really admire Xin-sama!"

"Xin-sama is…… that Rainbow Color Reciter?"

The Reciter equal to a legend, it made the girl's face turn even redder and she nodded slightly.

"Because, can you believe it? He's not even thirty years old. He's only a little more than ten years older than us, and he is already proficient in all of the Recitation Colors. Even though I've only seen pictures of him, he looks really handsome! I really hope to meet him one day. Ah …… If I could, I wish that one day I could become his apprentice—"

Mio's eyes sparkled as she portrayed the scene in her head. ……She's really unbearable. Although she sighed and laughed bitterly, she herself hadn't noticed that she had already entered the vain world.

"Yes, yes, I understand. That's why you're—"

It was just when she was about to stop Mio's endless monologue.

About twenty meters ahead of her, at the point where the road split into two, Kluele spotted a person that she had never met before.

It was a young child. Although it was hard to see from a distance, he couldn't be older than them. His hair was a dark purple, able to be called the color of a grape. He didn't wear a Tremia Academy uniform, but rather everyday clothes. Because he wore a black children's coat , he was especially eye-catching. Even though it was midsummer, it was surprising that he wore such thick clothing – But what made him even more intriguing was the bird-like creature perched on his shoulder.

"Eh, who is that child?"

It seemed that even Mio had realized. Because she wasn't carrying much in her hands, she jogged over.

"Hey, what are you doing? This is considered to be the school's campus, you know."

"Eh…… Ah, yeah. Oh, were you talking to me?"

The boy asked, looking startled. It seemed that because he had been so concentrated on gazing down each fork of the road that he hadn't noticed us until now. He had a gentle, androgynous face brimming with a childish nature.

He was…… a child, no matter how you looked at it.

To Kluele, he looked about twelve or thirteen years old . He was exactly the same height as Mio.

[I don't know which way to go. I heard that the student dormitories were down this road, but I wasn't told that there was a split in the path. Just which way should I take?]

The one who answered to the words above wasn't the boy—

"Wah, Arma. I told you clearly, you can't just suddenly open your mouth and start talking!"

The boy hastily covered the mouth of the creature on his shoulder. It wasn't a bird. The skin covering its body …… The proper way to call it would be scales. It

resembled the dark purple color of the boy's hair, but the color and luster were even stranger. That appearance seemed like……

"A lizard?"

Mio shrieked in an off-tone voice. At that sound, the enigmatic creature on the boy's shoulder narrowed its eyes.

[Not a lizard. Little girl, don't you recognize me?]

The thoroughly astounded Mio shook her head. How could she know! First of all, based on just the outward appearance, it didn't look like anything other than a lizard. Even more important was that its size was similar to a cat's. It was the first time that Kluele had seen a lizard that called itself 'I'.

"Ah, idiot Arma. I've repeatedly reminded you that you are not allowed to talk!"

[You don't have to worry, Neight. These two little girls seem to have the same interests as you. The fact that I can talk isn't a very significant matter.][1]

Similar interests? For a moment, she was bewildered by his point, but in other words……

"Hey, you. This interest isn't Reciting things, is it?"

Kluele moved her gaze from the reptile animal to the boy. She saw the boy's expression relax slightly.

"Yes, yes, that's right. But I didn't mean Reciting…… Ah, right, are you two both studying to become Reciters? Because when Arma started talking, common people would be very startled."

To conceal his embarrassment, the boy shyly scratched the back of his head.

……No, we were extremely startled.

Kluele swallowed the words that were about to come out of her mouth.

Although calling out a living creature wasn't difficult, being able to call out a high-level creature capable of human speech was a different matter. Based on the degree of difficulty, it should be equivalent to the second stage — a Recitation of the second scale. In other words,

even high school teachers would have trouble with this type of Recitation. How many children in the world would walk around freely with such a rare creature called out?

But that was not our problem. It wouldn't make a difference no matter how curious we were.

"Then, you are Neight-kun, right? The guy on your shoulder said — you were looking for the dormitory?"

[Hey, little girl, to call me ‘that guy’……]

Before he could finish his sentence, his mouth was once again covered by the boy.

“Ah, yes. You can just call me Neight. I transferred from another school. I just arrived here today, so I don’t know where the dormitories are……”

“Yeah, the dorms are just up ahead. Because it is divided into girls’ dormitories and boys’ dormitories, that’s why there are two roads here.”

Still holding the drawing paper, Mio raised her left hand.

“This way is the girls’ dormitories, and to the right are the boys’ dormitories.”

“So it’s like that. Thank you!”

Mio smiled at the boy, who bowed his head in gratitude.

“You’re welcome. I’m Mio, and she is Kulu—”

"I am Kluele. Since we go to the same school, perhaps we can meet again sometime."

Kluele replied hastily, in order to interrupt Mio's words.

With Mio's personality, she was definitely planning to use 'Kululu' to introduce me. When Mio calls me that, I don't take offense at the nickname. But when other people address me, I want them to at least use my official name. Although she thought that, the truth was that the name 'Kululu' seemed too childish and unsuitable.

"Mio-san and Kluele-san, right? Thank you very much ! Well then, I'll go and take a look. Arma, let's go."

[Little girls, thank you.]

……It makes me feel sad, to be called a 'little girl' by a lizard.

Although she really wanted to complain, what use would it be to scold a lizard?

Stifling the dissatisfaction in her heart, Kluele nodded lightly at the boy who bowed his head in gratitude.

Part 2

“Sorry I took so long, Mio. It’s your turn to take a bath now.”

Did it harm her to wait for such a long time? Kluele yelled out from the bathroom while using a towel to wipe her wet hair. She glanced at the clock in the change room. Woah, it was already so late…… Did she bathe for too long?

After eating dinner, Mio had let her go first, and because of the sweaty afternoon, she had subconsciously bathed for such a long time.

“Hey, Mio?”

Nobody answered. She should have been in the dining room beside the bathroom. Kluele stealthily opened the door and took a look, to discover Mio sitting with her elbow on the table, propping her cheek and staring at the ceiling.

“Hey, are you there…… Hey, are you listening to me?”

Just when she was about to walk up to Mio and block her line of sight, the girl finally opened her mouth.

“Let me ask you, Kululu, was that thing really called out?”

But apparently she seemed to react slowly. She seemed like she was talking to herself, with a dreamy expression.

“By ‘that’ you mean?”

“Didn’t we meet a kid today? I meant that thing standing on his shoulder.”

She seemed to be thinking about it. When Mio pondered over something, it was usually about something Kluele couldn’t see.

“That lizard, I don’t know whether to call it purple or black. Or maybe it wasn’t a well-known color. What type of Recitation did it take to call out such a thing?”

“……Hm, you’re right.”

Thinking about it now, perhaps it really was like that. That was a hard to describe color. If she had to take a

guess, it would be red or blue. But to classify it as one color, there were many aspects of it that didn't fit. It was something unable to be called out by either red or blue, with a mysterious dark hue.

"No matter what color it was, I wouldn't want to call out such an arrogant lizard."

She laughed bitterly while toweling her hair.

"Sure enough, a bird is better. I think I'll just decide on a bird. A bird is much better than that kind of disgusting reptile."

After saying that, Mio, who had been expressionless up until now, raised the corners of her mouth.

"I heard that birds are the most popular in the recital contest. About three hundred people have the goal of calling out a bird, so it's totally insignificant."

"Oh…… really?"

"At least I heard it was like that last year."

Even though Mio raised the mug to her mouth, her expression remained blank. Listening to her carefree tone of voice, does she plan to call out something different?

“What will Mio choose?”

“I will be calling out an animal, but I’m still hesitating. Should I call out many small animals, or one larger one?”

Out of all the Green creatures, which ones are considered big? Although she was curious, the reason Mio wasn’t explaining in detail was probably to give her a surprise.

“Let’s not talk about it anymore. Mio, if you don’t go take a bath now, the water will be cold.”

“Yeah, you’re right. Kululu, you’re too slow!”

“I came out a long time ago. It’s because you were so lost in thought that you didn’t notice. If you have time to stay here and complain, you might as well hurry up and go.”

From behind, she pushed the complaining Mio into the bathroom. I still have my club’s morning practice

tomorrow, so if you don't hurry and take a bath, I will be very annoyed.

"Your limit is ten minutes. When the time is up, turn off the lights!"

"Eh…… What, you cheater…… Wait a moment, Kulu __"

Ignoring the talking girl, Kluele closed the door of the change room.

Part 3

"Thank you for your hard work. Well then, please excuse me."

The bell declaring the arrival of the morning class resounded. After greeting the seniors at the club activity, Kluele charged full-speed into the first year's school building.

The space occupied by Tremia Academy was about three times the size of an average school. Walking from the clubroom to the first year's school building took at least half an hour.

"Woah, it's already this late……"

Shooting a glance at her wristwatch, there were two minutes left until class started. She gasped for air as she climbed the stairs of the building. After that— the sign of her classroom '1-B' came into her field of view. Putting her hand on the door handle, she maintained a running posture as she opened the door.

Because she exerted too much energy, the door swung incessantly, shaking as if in an earthquake. However, the students did not find this unusual. If she did not do this, she would be late for class. All of the students in the class already understood this.

"Kululu, good morning. Your record is pretty good; it was seven seconds faster than last month's average."

Mixed with a bitter laugh, Mio, who held a stopwatch in one hand, declared in a carefree manner.

"……I don't have time to care about that kind of stuff. Where's the teacher? Isn't she here yet?"

"Mm, she's not here yet. It looks like you're on time today."

"You mean, I'm also on time today."

Moving her gaze away from Mio, who seemed to still want to say something, she opened the backpack in her hand. Just when she was about to take out an energy drink, the door in front of her eyes opened.

Wearing a soft green outfit and with shoulder-length blonde hair dazzling in the sun, a woman walked smoothly into the classroom. She was the homeroom teacher, Kate.

"'Morning, everyone…… Ah, Kluele, you aren't late today."

The teacher taunted gently. She twitched her cheek for an instant.

"Is, Is this natural?"

Kluele pretended to calmly sit down. Those words caused Kate to shrug her shoulders.

—I…… Am I wrong?

I'm confident that I arrive at school earlier than anyone else, but because the club's morning exercise lasts almost until the preparation bell, I've earned the disgraceful title of 'King of arriving late to class'.

"I look forward to you continuing to arrive on time tomorrow…… Ah, it looks like all the other students are already here."

The teacher held back a laugh while beginning to take attendance of the students.

"There are also no special announcements today. We will conduct catalyst experiments in fifth block, so please gather at Laboratory One after finishing your lunch. This is the one thing you cannot forget. Next……"

Kate stopped and coughed lightly.

"Even though we are close to summer vacation, '1-B' has a new student. He is thirteen years old this year, and the youngest member of the class."

The atmosphere in the class immediately became friendly. A boy sitting in a nearby seat made a small noise of surprise. In a seat a little farther away, the usually absent-minded Mio was also surprised.

Because learning to become a Reciter isn't compulsory education, everyone all studies the same common subjects before twelve years old. After that, each decides what to focus on studying. Recitation school is merely one of the specialist schools.

As a result, there are no boundaries based purely on age. After finishing third year of middle school, and completing the fourth year of high school, one is able to obtain the qualifications to become a Reciter. Taking high school at only thirteen years old, means that at ten, he attended normal school and Recitation school at the same time? Although it wasn't unprecedented in history, it was undoubtedly a rare case.

"Let me introduce you to everyone. Neight-kun, please come in."

……Eh, Neight? Where have I heard that before?

As soon as the door opened, a boy wearing the white uniform of Tremia Academy came in.

He had dark purple hair, with height average for a thirteen-year-old boy. Although he was nervous and somewhat stiff, it was still possible to see his innocent, childish face. When their eyes met—

"Eh, Neight-kun?"

Before Kluele could speak, Mio, sitting in the corner of the classroom, cried out. For a split second, he was startled because someone suddenly called out his name. However, he soon said:

"Ah…… Eh…… It couldn't be Mio-san?"

"Mm, you still remember me. Ah, Kululu is here too!"

"Kululu?"

Seeing Neight's puzzled expression, Mio voluntarily pointed over this way —Mio, that idiot.

Kluele couldn't help but lower her shoulders while sighing. She had purposely introduced herself as 'Kluele' yesterday, but in a split second, her words were made futile.

"……Good morning, Neight."

"Ah, Kluele-san, good morning."

To be able to receive such a serious response made her thankful, but because of this, the gazes of all the students in the class were on her.

"—Well, Kluele, do you know this kid? Doesn't he look cute?"

The friend sitting behind her poked her in the back with a pen. Students around her also said things like, "Eh ? I didn't expect Kluele to know him. How unexpected!" ……It really was humiliating.

"Ah, Mio and Kluele, do you know this student?"

At hearing their conversation, question marks surfaced in Kate's mind.

"Yesterday, we met him near the dormitories."

Mio answered right away.

“I see. It’s good that you already have people you know. Ah, but Neight-kun, because the other people aren ’t familiar with you yet, could you please introduce yourself?”

“Ah…… Yeah, okay.”

Standing up straight, the boy on the stage bowed his head.

“Eh…… I am called Neight Yehlemihas. I used to go to a school in my hometown, but because my mother is a graduate of this school, I have always wanted to come here……”

The teacher gently put her hand on the boy’s shoulder, surveying the classroom.

“There is still time before the first class starts. Does anyone have any questions for him? It would be tiring for him to answer questions individually, so please ask any questions that you have right now.”

“Ah - ! Me, I have a question!”

The one who immediately raised her hand was the girl who had poked Kluele with a pen, Ada.

“Um, what color of Recitation do you want to specialize in?”

After hearing that question— the boy suddenly looked at the teacher in dismay.

“Um…… That…… Mine is…… a little different than normal.”

The teacher urged the embarrassed, mumbling boy to continue speaking.

“It’s called Night Color Recitation…… I’m…… studying that field.”

The boy lowered his head in an embarrassed manner and said those words.

“Night Color?”

Rather than saying she had tilted his head, her whole facial expression was dumbfounded as Ada pondered those words.

"Night as in Day and Night. Should I call it blackish-blue, or purple…… Either way, it's that kind of color of Recitation."

"The school that Neight-kun previously went to, did they teach that type of color?"

Looking at Ada, who had an unbelievable look on her face, he replied uneasily:

"Um, I don't think any place teaches it…… Because that is the original creation of my mother."

Original creation. Those words caused Ada to let out a small sigh.

"In other words, it's a new Recitation Color?"

However, he hurriedly waved his hand.

"No, it's not that amazing, and no application has been sent for a new Recitation Color…… And plus, I myself still haven't…… fully mastered it yet."

His voice became quieter as he spoke. Well, having just transferred, it was only natural.

Just when Kluele, who sat propping up her chin, was about to help him out of his embarrassment, the bell signaling the end of homeroom rang.

Part 4

The sun began to slowly climb up to the heavens, and the temperature in the room rose accordingly. Like a being in a sauna, it was a humid heat that stuck to people ’s skin. Now, the inside of the air-conditioned school cafeteria should have been overflowing with teachers and students without class. Those who had no class should have ordered themselves a cup of iced tea and gracefully passed the time there.

—But, that is based on the condition that students have no class to attend.

A sigh was about to escape her mouth, but Kluele stiffly swallowed it back.

In the Recitation school, foundation courses were taught in the morning while the afternoon was filled

with classes of practical drills. High school first year students spend approximately one year studying the basics of performing a recitation.

"Has everyone arrived?"

Wearing a white gown over her clothes, Kate walked around the laboratory.

Basically, recitation experiments were conducted in groups of four people.

One was the Reciter, one was the record keeper, and the other two were assistants to prevent an emergency situation.

Kluele's female partner was Mio, and her male partner was Alsem. —He was a tall student with an earnest nature, and specializing in Yellow Recitations. Finally, there was also Neight. Because he was a new student and currently studying an unclear Recitation, he became a partner that every group fought to get. But because she recognized the situation, Mio successfully half-forced him into her group.

"So, let's decide who will go first."

After she had finished making the straws, Kluele let the other three members of the group draw first. Although it was called an experiment, in general terms, it was simply conducting a Recitation of one's specialized color that served as a trial run for the recital contest three days later.

"Ah, I'm second."

Mio said in an unconcerned voice.

"I'm third."

"I seem to be fourth."

Following Alsem's words were Neight. ……In other words……

"……Ah, I'm first."

"Being first must be nervous."

Kluele shrugged her shoulders as a reply to Mio's teasing.

From the paint stacked beside the table, she took out the red can of paint. A Recitation must come in contact

with a catalyst. Kluele unwillingly squeezed out some paint from the can and smeared it on the fingertips of her left hand.

……Although the catalyst that beginning students used was convenient, the action of smearing it on her hand felt uncomfortable no matter how many times she did it.

"Neight, I'm ready."

With the stopwatch grasped in his hand, Neight made a signal.

"Alright, please begin."

While he spoke those words, Kluele closed her eyes.

In her mind, she pictured the thing that she wanted to call out and imagined constructing it right now in her left hand.

Red, flower petals that were a color deeper blood.

Even more important was that inside the complete perception, at the same time existed an illusion that would disperse at just a touch.

Resound from within the deep red
[—sheon lef ped-l-clue rien-c-soan]

Affection, arrogance, loveliness.

What she portrayed in her mind was a flower able to be described by many words.

Beyond (you) praise your name
YeR be orator Lom nehhe

Crimson, Sharp, Lovely
Lor besti redi ende kele-l-lovier

Devilishness of beauty and flicker of a sharp knife
Lor priidia rigveshi lovi, kele ledg

Oratorio
<Song of Praise>

It is used when calling the thing described in one's heart, the songs of praise composed from the Untouchable Language
Serafeno Musical Language).

By praising the name of the thing one wishes to call, it is invited. —This is the origin of the name Recitation. Using sound to send out information externally is to entice the Recital (Channel) Gate to open.

She slowly opened her eyes. The paint adhered to her left hand began to emit a red glow.

Changing visible light into energy.

In other words, the energy wavelengths of the red paint and the material being called right now produced the Same Tune (Synchronize) Phenomenon. Using the common energy wavelength as a medium to call out the target — that is the structure of a Recitation.

The time that the Recital (Channel) Gate is open isn't long at all. Without even blinking her eyes, Kluele stared fixedly at the red light blossoming in her left hand. The radiance gradually increased…… Resembling the shattering of glass, the rays of light suddenly began to break.

This represented the moment when the Recital (Channel) Gate was completely open.

——[Red Song Keinez]——

The breaking light fragmented and then gradually disappeared. Kluele very carefully opened her left hand. From between her fingers, a scarlet petal gently fell.

“Ah……”

Relieved, she let go of the breath that she had been holding in.

On her left hand bloomed — A scarlet flower.

“Oh, so it’s a flower! It’s very pretty. What kind of flower is it?”

Mio clapped her hands lightly.

“This is called an amaryllis. I really like this type of flower.”

She had originally planned to speak in a nonchalant voice, but she couldn’t stop the smile that appeared on her face.

“Exactly thirty seconds. Kluele-san is amazing.”

Kluele accepted the stopped stopwatch from Neight's hands. The time limit of the recital competition was about one minute. Thirty seconds was considered in the safe range.

The second person to step up was Mio. Using the green paint that she had bought yesterday, she called out a small turtle. She used fifty-five seconds. She had originally planned to call out two turtles, but because her concentration wasn't strong enough, she had changed it to one. The third person was Alsem, who attempted to call out a canary. However, a bird was different from a turtle or a flower; it was a moving animal. Because of this , the visualizing stage was considerably challenging. After two minutes of trying, he proclaimed to give up.

"Neight, you can begin any time."

Taking the record sheet and stopwatch, Kluele signaled to the partner in front of her.

"Ah, okay, I'll give it a try."

It seemed that Neight also used paint.

Night Color Recitations. It wasn't a Recitation written in the school textbook. Although Kluele's heart was half

filled with doubt, it seemed that Neight was serious. He poured black paint into the mixing tray, and then coated it over his fingertips.

A commotion burst out behind him. When he realized this and looked around him, he was amazed to find that all the other groups had temporarily stopped their movements and concentrated on watching this one group.

Under the gaze of so many people, wouldn't that make him unable to concentrate?

You guys should just continue to do your own work — If he had noticed sooner, he could have chided everyone. However, it was a pity that Neight had already commenced the Recitation.

Descend, dark curtain of twilight
[—cart lef dimi-l-shadi denca-c-dowa]

I praise the distant (your) name
YeR be orator Lom nehhe

Dark, courageous, pitiful (sorrowful)
lor besti bluci ende branousi-l-symphoeki

Master's single wing (transient master)
O she saira qersonie Laspha—

The surrounding atmosphere began to become noisy. Obviously, the reason was that nobody knew what this boy would call out.

As long as one is somewhat familiar with Recitations, they are able to use someone's Song of Praise chant to speculate on the thing being called out.

Kluele had already gone through the studies of middle school third year, and was familiar with the basics of Recitations. If the thing being called was a common object or creature, it could be recognized simply by hearing its Song of Praise. It should be like that.

Dark and majestic, as well as pitiful?

It was impossible to guess the true identity of the thing that Neight was currently calling out. The people beside her felt the same way. They could only gaze amazingly at the radiance arising from Neight's hand.

Black light. Rather, it would be more appropriate to call it shadows. A dusky shadow appeared on the boy's hand. Even though the laboratory was underneath the

glow of the setting sun, the shadow did not disappear. It could be called a stagnant night that negated the sun.

This is……

Although it was impossible to immediately believe it, this boy was conducting a Night Color Recitation. The shadow began to become larger and stronger. Gradually, it shrank into a sphere……

After that, the night split open.

The boy said in a quiet voice, a sound that would have been covered by the wind if the window had been open.

——[Night Song Ezel]——

In a split second, the room was full of black smoke.

The object being called out wasn't solid—

"Eh? W-What is this! Wait…… I can't breathe……"

After Mio's scream, everybody emitted cries of pain.

What had been called out was simply some common black smoke.

"Eh…… How could that be…… Just that……?"

From within the frenzy, Neight's bewildered voice could clearly be heard.

He had wanted to call out some kind of high-class creature, but had it come? This was the most common accident for beginners.

Although dust would appear when the object is burning, the fact that the more you wanted to breathe, the more dust you breathed in led to continual coughing. Eyes stung, and even eyelids felt like they could not be opened. If this was a material similar to the smoke created from a fire, then it was probably composed of carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide.

If they continued to breathe in these carbonic molecules and the substance arising from incomplete

combustions, it would harm their central nervous system and any organs used for breathing.

I must open the window!

She remembered that there should be a window by her left-hand side, but Kluele immediately considered it once again. No, right now, there was no time to open the lock. Closing her eyes, she imagined the position of the window in her mind. After standing up, she used her right hand to grasp the chair that she had just been sitting on.

……I'm not in charge of the compensation!

Without the slightest hesitation, Kluele threw the chair at the glass window.

Part 5

"It's already so late……"

Glancing at the stars twinkling above her head, Kluele quickened her footsteps. After the club activities had finished, she was going to the store at school. After purchasing enough medical products and groceries, she was already somewhat late.

……It still hurt a bit.

Whenever she touched the bandage wrapped around her right hand, it would cause a paralyzed feeling like an electric shock. This was the injury she received a few hours ago from breaking the window and cutting her hand on glass shards. Although it wouldn't hinder daily activities, after she had arrived at the healthcare clinic, it had been bandaged just to be careful.

The time it took for her to walk from the multi-purpose hall to the first-year school building was about ten minutes. Although the library and the gym towered in between, these two large buildings already had their lights turned out. Because they opened early in the mornings, their closing time was also early.

Her scalding body from during the day felt extremely cozy being caressed by the night's cold wind. The seeping cold, clear air soaked into the depths of her lungs . This refreshing feeling felt like taking a bath in the wind .

……Speaking of this, what happened to Neight?

Suddenly thinking of this, Kluele dragged her gaze from above her head back to the pathway.

After that—

After she had broken the window, the dust that filled the laboratory quickly disappeared without a trace. The unstable substance that the originally failed Recitation had called out. Thinking about it now, that was a situation she should have been able to predict.

Even so, there were only a small number of students with an aching throat or pained eyes.

The inside wall of the laboratory was also smoked black, looking like the filth accumulated after a whole year. Although it included Mio and herself, while the remaining students proceeded to clean up, Neight continuously apologized to everyone throughout the next hour. He apologized to the teacher Kate, the headmaster, the students in the class, and also the one who cut her finger on the window glass, Kluele.

A Recitation failure was something that could not be helped. You were only thirteen years old, and it was also on the first day after transferring schools. Conducting a

Recitation under the gaze of so many students, it would have been hard to succeed. Although they comforted him like that, they still couldn't easily do anything to cheer up his spirit. Neight had hung his head for the entire day , until all the classes were finished.

At last, the first-year school building gradually came into view. Because it was currently forbidden to enter that laboratory, the lights were already out. The only ones with lights still on should be the medical room, office, and security room. That's right, these should be the only places with lights still turned on.

However……

……That is.....our classroom?

It was the second classroom on the third floor. Although the curtains were closed, the light still leaked out from a small crack in the curtains. Who could it be?

"……No way."

These words rode the wind, and along with the light, disappeared in the black night.

***

“Neight, can you bring that over for me?”

Mother looked at the photograph that she wanted to put in a frame.

“Is it this one?”

The photo was hung on the wall near the ceiling, and no matter how he stretched his arm, he couldn’t reach it. After standing on a chair and stretching as high as he could, his fingers finally touched the edge of the photo frame.

—This picture, what is it?

Although it was said to be a picture, what was depicted inside wasn’t a person, and couldn’t be considered scenery. The whole photo was entirely black. Even if one took a picture of coal at close range, it couldn ’t be said for sure whether this kind of photograph would be taken. However, he really couldn’t think of the reason for taking this kind of photo. Could it be because

it was burnt? But if that was so, it wouldn't be necessary to keep it. I have always been curious about this.

"Mother, here."

He handed it to his mother, who was lying in bed. However, she didn't intend to take it.

"……Mother?"

"Neight, I give that photograph to you."

Maintaining her position on the bed, Mother lifted the quilt slightly.

"What photograph…… is this?"

"It is especially for the purpose of the Recitation you are currently practicing, intended to be a catalyst."

Rarely, very rarely, did Mother speak in such a soft voice. Even when her body was in good condition, it is rare for her expression to be so gentle.

"But, this isn't a photograph of anything in particular."

"Because it was taken at night, it is hard to identify. However, depicted in this picture is fire."

Fire? It is obviously pitch-black, but this is fire? Neight hurriedly swallowed back the words that were about to leave his mouth, because his mother never lied or told any jokes.

"Neight, there is one more type of Recitation that I haven't taught you."

Not knowing whether he already knew about it or not, he had been originally staring at the ceiling and now watched Mother close her eyes.

"This is a Recitation created for your sake. Therefore, Neight, I will teach this only to you."

***

[Why did you wish to call me out?]

The voice beside his ear wasn't really questioning him demandingly. Transmitted in his eardrums was purely a tone of skepticism.

[In order to call me out, even your mother spent several years' time. You shouldn't have forgotten this, have you? I am not something suitable for you to call out at your present level.]

Neight lay on the table, listening silently, but his companion paid no attention to him and continued to speak.

[The dormitory I am located in is about two thousand meters away from this school. However, there isn't a big relationship between the distance and the Recitation. But you ought to know, using Recitation to summon me is an extremely difficult thing in itself.]

……I know that.

Neight really didn't want to start talking, and merely heaved a sigh in his mind.

But I wanted to challenge myself. I can count the number of Recitations I know with my fingers. Because

of this, I want to try out new Recitations as much as possible.

"I've told Mother before. Arma, don't you also know? I have to show my Night Color Recitations to the people Mother promised."

As if it was an ordinary incantation, those words caused his companion to fall silent.

"Arma, let me ask you, was Mother really that powerful?"

[……Yes she was.]

Although his voice was so low that other than himself, nobody could sense it, it was rare for this Recited creature's voice to seem so gentle. It was as if he was reminiscing, as if he grieved. However, the one who spoke didn't notice this himself.

[She was the only Reciter who I acknowledged. In terms of talent, she far exceeded you.]

—I still have not received the approval of this Recited creature.

So his words concealed this meaning. That was an unmistaken, unable to be concealed fact. But even so, Neight's heart was still filled with an unwillingness that he couldn't express.

[However, don't forget that I am here to raise your ability.]

As if he was propelled by those words, Neight's lifted his head. Right now, Arma was so close that Neight could almost touch him with his nose. Arma was neither standing on the table nor on his shoulders. Unfolding the wings on his shoulder that had originally been folded on his back, Arma hovered in the air.

"I haven't seen you fly in such a long time."

[Although it wasn't bad to stay on the ground, I seem to have almost forgotten how to fly.]

"Don't push yourself. You can only fly for a maximum of forty seconds, right?"

The way that the Recited creature floated awkwardly and concentrated so hard that he didn't reply, made Neight unable to help but laugh.

"……But, if there's no way for me to be as amazing as Mother, I will certainly be troublesome to other people. Even today, I ended up harming Kluele-san……"

[The little girl from yesterday? But from what you have told me, I think that if it's only that kind of injury, the little girl will not think much of it.]

When talking about this, he was still a Recited creature . What Neight worried about wasn't only the physical injuries, but also his responsibility and compensation.

"No. Arma, you don't understand—"

"Just like you said, I don't mind it, so you shouldn't take it to heart. Originally, it was me who wanted to smash the glass. However, I was criticized by that arrogant lizard, which was what made my heart a little unsteady."

"Sure, sure. Because you didn't mind, therefore…… eh ?"

He had suddenly heard the sound of a female voice. Not only that, it was also a familiar voice. Neight hastily turned around, and saw her standing directly in front of him.

A girl with a bandaged right hand was currently leaning against the door of the classroom.

“Like I thought, it was you.”

Thinking that it was possible and then coming over to see, sure enough, she was right. Kluele smiled wryly, let out a sigh, and walked to the seat directly in front of Neight.

“Um…… That…… Sorr–”

In that instant, the boy flinched and didn’t know what to do. Just when he wanted to open his mouth, Kluele used her forefinger to lightly poke his forehead.

“Don’t apologize anymore. Haven’t you been doing that the whole day already? Always hearing you apologize will make me feel ashamed.”

“O-Okay……”

When he promised with a nod, the sound of his voice was still very stiff. Because he was very pitiful to look at,

Kluele moved her line of sight away from him with no clear destination. However, she happened to end up staring at the lizard standing on the table.

[Little girl, like I have said many times already, I am clearly not an arrogant lizard—]

"Then, you're just a lizard that is able to fly?"

[After clearly seeing me fly, you are still calling me a lizard……]

Arma immediately replied. But the lizard seemed to give up, and abruptly hung his head. This human-like action looked extremely ridiculous.

"Anyways, I didn't eavesdrop on you guys purposely."

Just when she was hesitating about how to talk to the boy lying on the table, Kluele had heard the conversation between the other two. Looking at the apparently pouting Recited creature, she asked:

"You just said…… This guy was called out by Neight's mother?"

"……Yes. In order to call out Arma, the Night Color theory must be constructed. My Recitations are all things that Mother has left me."

To be honest, this was the one point that Kluele couldn't understand. Night Color Recitations. Using this creature who was almost falling asleep on the table as an example, although he was a little annoying, he had a considerably high level of intelligence. The Reciter who was definitely capable of conduction this high level Recitation, why didn't she announce this sixth color of Recitation?

"Because Mother had let almost nobody see Night Color Recitations. And seemingly from the beginning, she hadn't wanted to apply for Night Color Recitations as a new Recitation color."

Was it because she wasn't interested in becoming famous? But then why did she act like that?

"I've heard…… it was because of a promise."

Neight, who had been sitting the whole time, now stood up. Holding onto the window frame, he gazed at the glass that separated himself from the outside world.

"Although she didn't tell me that person's name, she told me that she already had a promise with a certain person. I gradually learned Reciting from Mother, but…… one year ago, Mother……"

Because of the light in the classroom, it should have been impossible to see the scenery outside. The only thing he could see was probably his inverted silhouette in the glass.

"As long as I continue to study Night Color Recitations , there will definitely be a day when I will meet that person. That's what Mother told me. Because it's like this , I thought that I might as well attend the school that Mother had formerly attended."

Shy and introverted, that had been Kluele's impression of the boy until now. But now she was impressed to discover that she had been wrong.

To leave his home at only thirteen years old, just for the sake of coming to this school. This was an unfamiliar environment, without anyone he knew, and surrounded by students all older than him. —All of this was simply to fulfill the promise his mother had made.

……If she had to stand in the same position, could she do that?

At least at this age, her mind was merely focused on playing with her friends.

"—You're really amazing."

Following an involuntary sigh, she said those words.

"You are truly amazing!"

"Eh…… amazing……?"

Because of her sudden exclamation, the boy appeared to be bewildered. But it doesn't matter, because it was simply talking to herself.

"The only reason I wanted to become a Reciter was because I simply thought 'It seemed interesting'. That's all."

After taking a seat, Kluele crossed one leg over the other.

—How boring! It was such a mediocre reason.

"There was nothing that I especially wanted to do. Even now, it's the same. Generally speaking, everyone who attended high school all wanted to become Reciters. That's why they worked hard. But, I still don't know if I want to become a Reciter or not."

Without much thought, she had selected the high school with the most outstanding achievements.

That choice had happened to be learning Recitation—Really, that was her simple reason.

She could have become a person who ran a freight transport business or someone who purely researched the theory of Recitations. A person with a Reciter qualification could, in reality, work in a variety of occupations. She didn't know for what reason her classmates had the goal of becoming Reciters. But although she didn't know, she sensed that everyone worked hard in hopes of achieving their goal.

However, she could not be classified among that. She simply attended class in a relaxed manner, day after day. In her heart, she had always been afraid, afraid that one day someone would find that out about her.

She couldn't speak what she sincerely felt to either Mio or her parents…… No, that was wrong. She was simply unable to have those words leave her mouth. Perhaps she simply didn't have the courage to say those words in front of people who worked so hard.

"Is this really the path that I will advance on? Is there a different path? I have always thought about this question ."

Although she wanted to smile, her expression reflected in the window seemed very stiff.

A self-deprecating feeling pressed down on her chest. Sometimes, to her eyes, Mio looked extremely dazzling. She wanted to become a Reciter, and truthfully, she did not hesitate to try her hardest.

……Compared to her, what am I doing?

"In the end, I am a person with high standards but little ability. I know a little bit of everything, but end up quickly becoming tired of it. Therefore, I only end up learning everything half-way."

Attending high school without any goal whatsoever, and seeming like having achieved nothing at graduation —Although she has only attended this school for half a year, her head was filled with those kinds of thoughts.

She undoubtedly felt uneasy, unable to immerse herself in any one thing. Previously, she would have felt angry at herself, but she had become numb to it a long time ago.

"How could that be…… That's not true!"

Suddenly, the boy shook his head with all his strength.

"Kluele-san is definitely suitable for becoming a Reciter. Your recitation today was amazing!"

"……No, that kind of thing can be done by everyone if they want to."

Forcing herself to smile, Kluele calmly denied him. The Recitation of such a small and immobile object was not difficult at all. After all, having becoming a Reciter as a goal and then going to high school could be accomplished by everyone she knew.

Although she opposed his words, the boy still hesitatingly said:

"……I think that because the one doing this is Kluele-san, that's why such an amazing result can be achieved."

"—Eh?"

What was that supposed to mean? Just when she was about to ask……

"Oh, how should I say it…… Although saying it to the person herself isn't very appropriate, but…… The fresh red flower that Kluele-san called out, I think that it suits Kluele-san very well."

Although he stood with his head bowed and at a loss of what to do, the boy in front of her eyes with a face as red as an amaryllis flower spoke those words. That flower— does it really suit me?

"Ah, no…… sorry…… I had no other intention for speaking those words. That was simply what I actually think."

Because she had stayed silent, the boy had though that she was angry. His expression finally jolted Kluele back into action.

There was nothing to explain. It was simply because it was too abrupt and the compliment was said to her face-to-face, which caused her to freeze. Unsure of how to respond, her mind became blank.

“Eh…… Ah, mm. I know, so calm down. I was just a little stunned, that’s all.”

She waved her hand in a flustered manner. That really was humiliating. He was only thirteen years old, but it was me who looked agitated.

“……But, thank you.”

Her smile reflected in the window was definitely not a fake one.

She had never thought about it herself, but here was someone cheering her on so seriously.

Not embellishing his words, and speaking in a simple and clumsy manner —But it was truly honest encouragement. Because of this, she felt sincerely happy.

……I should also try my hardest at something.

Although she didn't believe that she could immediately find something that she wanted to study, even so, she must try hard to find it. Before she finds her answer, it would be good to try hard at Recitations.

"I will follow your example and try my best."

Standing up, Kluele went beside him and opened the window. Through a small crack in the window curtains, she felt the cold wind blowing at her hair.

"W-What example? There's no such thing……"

The boy hastily shook his head.

Seeing his expression, Kluele couldn't help but smile while letting out a breath.

"No, you should feel proud! Because you let me experience that earnest feeling, after hearing you say that makes me feel considerably ashamed."

……For some reason, I feel jealous.

Being the complete opposite of herself, the boy possesses a steady will, and faces forward wholeheartedly.

……Was there a time when I acted in such a way?

Disregarding feelings of love, perhaps I want to stay together with this child.

The reason being— the path he wants to walk is truly too dazzling. It wasn't the harsh light that made others want to move away their gaze, but rather the kind of dazzle that made others want to stay by his side and support him.

After slowly blinking her eyes, Kluele said to Neight:

"Then, it's almost time for us to go. Although it is in school, it is still dangerous to be out so late. Let me escort you back."

"Eh? But Kluele-san is a girl!"

Although she teased him with a smile, the boy actually had a serious expression.

But you are only thirteen, your height is shorter than this girl, and your physique is skinny. If you want to protect me, don't you have to wait a while longer? Just like protecting a princess, you don't meet the standards yet!

"Ah, I usually exercise in club activities."

"Club activities?"

"Self-defense. Because I live alone, ever since middle school, my parents have made me learn self-defense."

After saying that, she used her bandaged right hand to grab the boy's hand.

"Come on, let's go."

"K-Kluele-san…… your right hand! It's injured, so don 't move it around!"

Although Neight hastily tried to shake off her hand, Kluele stubbornly gripped more tightly.

“This? It doesn’t hurt at all. The healthcare teacher made a huge fuss over it, and made me bandage it.”

Actually, it did hurt. But despite that pain, Kluele wanted to hold hands with him.

***

The presence of the setting sun faded away, and was replaced by the color of the descending night.

Just before the closing time of the visitor’s reception building, a man wearing a dry-grass colored coat entered .

Under the shine of the light, a calm and symmetrical face could be seen.

“My apologies. Has the headmaster already left?”

He had hair that could not be called neither gold nor brown.

—Mm, where had his face been seen before?

The man who worked both at the office and as a security guard concealed the amazement in his heart, and cautiously replied with a business-like response:

“Please wait a moment. No, I think he is still in his office. However, the time allowed for off-campus people to enter the campus is almost up. If you wish to stay for a long period of time, I suggest you come earlier on another day. If it is important, please leave your name and a message.”

“……No. It is not an important matter. Then, I will come back tomorrow after school. Please just tell him ‘ Xin was here’ and that will be all.”

After saying that, the man turned over his coat and turned around to leave.

“I understand.”

Following the man's figure with his eyes until it could not be seen, the man who had received the visitor closed the window of the visitor's reception building.

Who could that have been? Although he couldn't remember, he was sure that he had seen that face somewhere before.

2nd Play: Symphony of the Masses

Part 1

Large groups of small birds could be seen flying outside the window. With still about half an hour left until the start of homeroom, the other students were still doing their club's morning activities. Right now, there were not many students in the classroom.

"Oh, Kululu, what's wrong? You came very early today."

Mio was an exception, being one of the few people currently in the classroom. She seemed to arrive earlier than anyone else in the class, but still secretly studies diligently by herself every morning. Although she herself wanted to conceal that fact, this became something that everyone in the class knew a long time ago.

"Although there was morning practice, I didn't go. Think carefully, the recital contest is almost here. Also, my injury from yesterday must also heal quickly."

"That's true. Then, in the end, will Kululu choose a bird? It will be bad if you still don't start practicing."

"Oh, I was considering it all the way until I fell asleep yesterday, but I still haven't decided."

It would be bad if she didn't decide soon. Kluele clearly knew this. However, like Mio pointed out before, the only thing she had thought about was birds. She totally hadn't considered any other things.

……If a bird wouldn't work, could she use the flower she had tried out yesterday?

While she was thinking with her arms crossed, another student walked into the classroom.

It was a boy with grape-colored hair and a childish face. Although he wore a small-sized school uniform, the sleeves were still too long, causing it to wrinkle everywhere.

"Neight-kun, good morning!"

"Ah, Kluele-san, Mio-san, good morning!"

"'Morning. You arrived pretty early."

"Ah, speaking of that……"

After quietly saying those words, Mio closed the textbook she had been reading.

“While I was walking to school, I think I heard the third-year or fourth-year students talking about Neight-kun.”

Because of those words, Neight’s expression became stiff.

“……Well, I did cause the laboratory to be filled with smoke.”

“Ah, not that, not that!”

Was it opposite from the reaction she had anticipated? Mio rarely showed such a forced smile.

“Isn’t Neight-kun only thirteen years old? Attending high school at such an age is truly very strange.”

“Is that so?”

As if he had relaxed, Neight’s tone of voice rose.

“Yeah. Also, it was called Night Color Recitation, right ? I think they also mentioned that.”

The teacher, Kate, definitely knew about it, so the other teachers should also know. During homeroom or some other time, they had probably mentioned it to their students.

Mio was still not done speaking, but the boy holding the black bag suddenly showed an expression even more child-like than yesterday's. His eyelids seemed heavy, and his eyesight wavered as if it could not stay in focus.

……He looked like he was sleeping.

She silently gazed at him, but in the end their eyes happened to meet.

"Because I recently transferred schools, that…… I'm still nervous, so I can't sleep well."

Neight, who had narrowed his eyes, indeed looked like he lacked sleep. He embarrassedly scratched his head.

"Don't worry, Kate-sensei is a good person. Even if you come late, she won't be angry. Next time, take your time coming to school."

"Hey, don't teach him about false things."

Mio acted just like she used to do, smiling while she spoke irresponsible words. Kluele lightly poked her on the head, and continued to place the stuff in her bag on the table.

Throughout the campus, the bell rang, signaling the start of the first class.

However, there was no sign of the teacher who should have been standing on the stage, and there also weren't many students.

There were two days left until the recital contest. Because the combined test had already ended, except for homeroom, the other classes consisted of students planning by themselves. They conducted Recitation exercises on campus, went out to purchase catalysts, or studied theory in the library. When the bell rang, more than half of the students had already rushed out of the classroom.

Therefore, after the bell had rung, the only people still sitting motionless in the classroom were herself and Mio.

"Mio, do you have any plans?"

The person being questioned was currently leaning on a table and staring at the ceiling.

"Yeah— I have already decided the thing I want to call out, so right now, I'm considering what to use as a catalyst."

"Eh? Aren't you using drawing paper?"

"I need to think it over again. If I can't find a better catalyst, my Recitation is likely to fail."

A high-level Recitation requires the use of a matching catalyst. Exactly what was she planning?

……However, considering Mio's personality, even if I asked her right now, she surely wouldn't tell me.

"Want to try randomly mixing a few catalysts?"

"Mm. But isn't Kululu still unsure of what to Recite? Is it okay for you to accompany me?"

"Instead of continuously thinking about it, I'd rather do something else. Perhaps I'll have a sudden inspiration . So don't worry."

What did Neight intend to do? If he had no other plans , she should invite him to come with them. Despite having such an idea, when Kluele immediately looked at his seat, she noticed that he had already left a long time ago.

“Did Neight-kun also leave already? It couldn’t be that you were planning to invite him……”

“It doesn’t matter, let’s go.”

Kluele walked towards one end of the hallway, and Mio hastily chased after her. While she walked down the stairs, she looked at Kluele.

“Eh, why is Kululu acting so cold?”

“I’m not. I think Neight probably left already.”

Last night, she had escorted Neight to the boys’ dormitories, and then returned afterwards. When they talked about the recital contest, once she mentioned that she didn’t know what to choose as a catalyst— Kluele suddenly remembered the words that he had whispered quietly. But if she were to say it out loud, Mio would

definitely interrogate her about it. In order to stay away from the friend at her side, Kluele moved rapidly down the hallway.

The laboratory was located at the northernmost side of the first floor. In order to prevent the chemicals inside from being exposed to the sun and go bad, only this classroom was located in such a place that it would not be exposed to sunlight even in the middle of summer. Inside there, the dizzying summer heat suddenly changed so that even the wind blowing past the hallway contained coldness.

It was a close distance from Laboratory One to Laboratory Three. Among these, only in the innermost Laboratory Three, was a light leaking out from the classroom into the corridor.

Stealthily peeking inside, she saw a boy wearing a white school uniform.

—See, he's here!

After expressing this with only her gaze, Mio suddenly turned around.

"Stop sulking. Hurry up and go in."

After the door opened, the boy immediately turned to face them.

“Ah, Kluele-san, and Mio-san is here too.”

Kluele didn’t speak, but instead lightly waved her hand. Alone at the table meant for six people, Neight silently prepared experiment materials.

On the table were five triangular flasks, ten test tubes, and two measuring cylinders, in addition to a pipette, scales, Bunsen burner, and even a microscope. There were also a variety of other reagents, from solids to liquids, totaling about twenty different types on the table . ……You certainly are a person who tries hard.

Although the preparation was thorough, one could not help but feel speechless.

“Do you have an idea for a catalyst?”

Mio asked him while stroking the Bunsen burner.

Catalysts, used during all Recitations, can be classified into two categories: natural materials, and manmade materials. Out of the former, the research about which

catalysts were the best was approximately complete. However, because manmade catalysts were dependant on combining various materials, an almost innumerable amount could be made.

"Eh…… Not a clue."

Neight shook his head bluntly while mixing reagents.

"Anyhow, I figured that I would just try randomly."

However, this was also fairly convenient for the two girls. If he already had an idea of what to use and they hung around him like this, he would be unable to concentrate and it would cause complications. If he hadn't decided what to use yet, then it didn't matter even if the two of them were here.

"Can we work together with you? We are also discussing it, and we hope to find some good catalysts."

"Of course you can, but…… other people have already come before you."

Other people were here already? After showing a questioning expression, Neight focused his glance on the shadow of the desk.

[Hm…… little girls.]

Sitting alone on the chair was that arrogant lizard.

“Eh? Why is Arma here?”

Mio’s tone of voice did not indicate surprise, but rather , that she found the situation simply inconceivable.

[Today, if something like yesterday were to happen, I wouldn’t have the nerve to face this guy’s mother.]

“Just recently, when I looked inside my backpack, I found that he had somehow sneaked in unknowingly……”

Neight hung his shoulders as if he was tired. He had opened his backpack to take out a textbook, but instead discovered a large lizard inside —Kluele didn’t even want to think about this type of thing. She finally understood why Neight had hurriedly left and hid in the laboratory without saying a word to them.

“Are you knowledgeable about catalysts?”

The lizard roughly waved his tail from side to side to substitute for shaking his head.

[Not at all. If it was something about Recitations, then I would understand it somewhat, but a Recited creature does not meddle with stuff like catalysts.]

“That's no good!”

Kluele sighed exaggeratedly, deliberately wanting to make him feel her disappointment.

……Then, for what reason are you here?

Part 2

“Well then, where should we go to test it?”

Carrying laboratory flasks in her arms, Kluele looked all around.

Even though they had mixed together a few possible catalysts, if they didn’t put it to actual practice in a Recitation, it wouldn’t be possible to tell whether or not they truly could be used as catalysts. The problem was choosing a location for the practice. It must be a place without obstacles, and with a wide-enough space—

"About the recital contest the day after tomorrow, has Neight decided what to call out?"

"Speaking of that."

The boy carrying beakers in both of his hands turned around.

"Because Night Color Recitations can only call out black-colored things, it isn't ideal for this kind of debut. Previously, I have called black snakes and crows, as well as bats……"

"…...What you said makes a lot of sense."

All the animals that he had listed were ones that people didn't really want to look at.

"Neight, let's just choose there."

Using her gaze to substitute for her hands which were occupied by flasks, she gestured at a grassy field in one corner of the campus. It was a space where thin and tall trees grew. If it were a wide-open space with a good view, then Neight's Night Color Recitation would very

possibly be noticed by other people. Thus, in order to avoid the attention of those around them, this was a perfect place.

The fact that there was a first-year student who used Night Color Recitations was already well known throughout the school. In addition to the unexpected accident had happened in the laboratory yesterday, they must practice while keeping a low profile.

"The remaining one that I still haven't tried is the black horse."

As if he had suddenly remembered this, he turned his head around and added.

……Oh. After thinking it over a little, Kluele nodded at him.

"That's a good idea. Do you want to give it a try?"

Compared to a black snake or bat, a black horse would be much more popular at the recital contest. So that's why he made all sorts of catalysts, so there would be no damage even if he failed. It was a worthy challenge.

"That's true. This opportunity won't come by often, so I'll just try it."

"I'm ready here."

Holding the record-sheet with one hand, she waved a pen at him. Speaking about the kinds of catalysts, Kluele and Neight prepared five types while Mio mixed together seven types. Because Mio had the most, she would be the last to experiment. While she was waiting, they had her take care of that troublesome creature in a slightly distant location.

"Then, watch me try it out."

Pulling open the lid of the flask, Neight sprinkled the liquid all around him. After confirming that the green lawn was stained with black, he silently closed his eyes.

Mixed in with the wind was the Night Color Recitation 's <Song of Praise (Oratorio)>.

Listening to the Recitation's Serafeno Musical Language— Oh, this time she understood. It truly was a black horse's <Song of Praise (Oratorio)>. It was nearly identical to

the <Song of Praise (Oratorio)> used by White Recitations to call out a white horse. In addition, it seemed like he was concentrating very hard.

When the catalyst was synchronized with the Recited creature, a black Recital Gate (Channel) emerged before their eyes, as if being swallowed by light. After arriving at this stage , all that remained was the last breath.

Good luck! Kluele tightly clenched her fists, staring at the situation—

—At that moment……

Something came flying at the creature being called out.

“Neight!”

With no time to warn him to crouch, Kluele pushed him down while yelling out his name. A red object immediately flew over their heads.

“Are you okay?”

After confirming that Neight had nodded his head, Kluele turned her line of sight to the object. About five meters away was a student wearing a uniform. He was a

tall man with short hair the yellow color of dirt. On the cuff and collar of his uniform were four scarlet lines— a student of the highest grade, who specialized in Red.

"What was that just now?"

"Don't stare at me like that! My Recitation simply went out of control, and flew towards you guys."

Kluele shifted her field of vision and moved her gaze. The surface of the tree that had been hit by the flying object was burned black.

"The Recitation you just conducted was a flame, right?"

"For a first year student, you're really knowledgeable about this. Do you also specialize in Red?"

"Don't change the topic!"

After hearing his seemingly teasing tone, Kluele hardened her voice.

The Recitation of a flame uses something other than fire as a catalyst, and is combined with the technique for calling out fire. A low grade catalyst like paint is

generally used to call out fire, then that flame can be used as a catalyst to conduct a high rank Recitation. But for a skilled person, “throwing the flame at an opponent” like before is not difficult at all.

“Just now, you were aiming at Neight, weren’t you!”

“Don’t falsely accuse me. What proof do you have?”

Maintaining a position with his hands in the pockets of his uniform, the student snarled.

But to Kluele, for him to defend himself like this was something she had expected.

“When conducting the Recitation of a flame, you must make sure that everyone is a minimum of ten meters away from you. Have you forgotten this? Even in middle school, this is part of the basics! No matter how you put it, you are the one at fault!”

The student’s expression twisted. But even so, he still had a sneer on his face.

“If he is the legendary Night Color Reciter, shouldn’t he be able to dodge something as insignificant as that?”

……I see, so it's like that.

'On my way to school, I think I heard third-year or fourth-year higher grade students talking about Neight-kun.'

—It was like what Mio had said this morning. So the rumors about Neight also had this kind of meaning.

"Are you afraid of losing to him in the recital contest?"

"I only thought it was necessary to give him a show of our strength."

She had thought that he would pretend to act oblivious, but she didn't expect him to admit it straightforwardly.

Many famous Reciters will be invited to the recital contest. To this year's fourth-year students who were about to graduate, this recital contest was their last opportunity. If they were able to give off a good impression, they could become the Reciter's apprentice, or use that occasion as a powerful stepping stone. However, in this year's recital contest, thirteen-year-old Neight will be there, in addition to using a mysterious Recitation Color. No matter what the outcome of his

Recitation is, that his Night Color will attract the attention of visitors is an obvious fact.

—That student…… Is he afraid of such a boring thing?

"How shameful. Haven't you ever thought of facing him head-on?"

"Hm? That's why I'm facing him directly."

Moving slowly and dramatically, he took both of his hands out of the pocket of his uniform.

"Night Color Recitation apprentice, let's have a contest ! The one who loses is not allowed to enter the recital contest. I assume that you will accept?"

"Wha……!"

Such an excessively unreasonable and dreadful statement caused Kluele to become momentarily speechless.

"Are you an idiot?! Neight is only thirteen, how could he do such a thing!"

Kluele stood up straight to protect the terrified boy who was currently getting up from the ground. As for Neight himself, he probably didn't even understand the meaning behind his opponent's words.

The word "contest" that is used between Reciters.

It implicitly indicated— a duel.

Although Reciters used their skills to fight each other one on one, that wasn't the only action they were capable of. By using aggressive Recited creatures or flames, it was possible to attack an opponent directly. Needless to say, one could be seriously hurt, or some unexpected accident might happen.

"It's too bad, you don't have the right to decline!"

The opponent's right hand flashed with red light. So the reason that he had hidden his hands in his pockets was so they wouldn't notice he was holding a catalyst?

No, that's not what was important— it couldn't be, he was joking, right?

However, the crazy look in his eyes sent shivers up Kluele's spine. This boy was serious. Without the slightest hesitation, he threw the flame in his right hand.

The chill that she felt had become reality. A flame the size of a child's head flew at the boy who stood stock still and didn't understand the current situation.

"Neight!"

Would she make it in time?

Just when she wanted to push Neight out of the path of the flame……

A splash of water came flying from the side and doused the flame.

"You shouldn't do that!"

Other than the sound of the mixing of water and fire, came a familiar voice.

"'Contests' between students must have the permission of the headmaster, and one of the students must hold Reciter qualifications. Without that, contests

are not allowed. Furthermore, the problem is, it doesn't look like they are willing to duel!"

The voice seemed to be coming from beside her ear. She turned around to look. Standing only several steps away from them was a man of medium height, wearing a coat the color of dry grass.

He was fairly young, probably less than thirty years old. Although from afar one could tell that he had shapely facial features, Kluele had never met him before. If he had appeared on the campus like that, it would mean he was a teacher, right?

"……Are you a teacher?"

The boy's voice was filled with malice.

"No. However, I am still your senior."

Seemingly paying no attention to the boy's tone, the man wearing the plain coat replied indifferently.

"People who don't understand the circumstances shouldn't interfere."

"Although I don't understand the situation, no matter how I look at it, it seems like you are picking a fight."

"Ah…… Even though you suddenly intrude like this, you still dare to preach at me…… You're annoying!"

After shouting out those words, the hands of the boy being confronted emitted a red light.

It was really too sudden. Carrying out a one-sided attack without warning, it would not be allowed even in a duel. Unconcernedly, he—

Facing the approaching flame, the Reciter's coat fluttered like a cloak.

"Even if I'm not a teacher, let me give you a suggestion ."

The flame stopped before it touched his hair. Not only did he not bother to avoid it, but he also blocked it with his bare hands.

"Flames are truly effective when used to impede someone's actions. But in a 'contest' between Reciters, it should not be used so lightly."

The flame that hit his right hand still burned as fiercely as before. But instead of severely burning him, the Reciter seemed to have caught the flame, and lifted it up in his hand. He was not burned…… In other words, "he had diverted the heat of the flame somewhere else"?

"If your opponent is a Red Color Reciter, this attack could be reversed…… Like so!"

The flame shone radiantly. Was this the light of a Recitation? The appearing radiance filled all of the space around them. Because it was too dazzling, Kluele couldn't help but close her eyes.

Something created a sound that resounded in her eardrums, and continued to emit a heavy gasping noise. She felt like an enormous creature had appeared beside her……

"Ah…… ah……?"

Neight let out a wordless murmur.

In a place where he could reach out and touch, a lion with scarlet fur had been called out. Simply its height was almost as tall as Neight's shoulder, and its body length was definitely over two meters. The tip of its tail was a blazing flame. The pair of wings on its back was also red colored. Amidst all of that, its amber eyes stood out exceptionally.

—A manticore.[2] Even for Kluele, it was her first time seeing such a creature.

"What! You… you've got to be kidding me… Didn't you call out water just a while ago? Not only Ruguz(Blue), but you can also use Keinez(Red)!"

Was he angry or stunned? The male student's shoulders shook. However, those were truly harsh but powerless words. Because, before he had finished his Recitation, the outcome of the battle had already been decided.

Even if the student wanted to start a Recitation now, the attack of the manticore would still be a step ahead of him. In that split second, the truth was, he had been checkmated.

"……So, do you still want to continue?"

Instead of sounding like a command, the man's tone seemed to be more of a confirmation.

It was an overwhelming victory. Not only that, but by using the opponent's color, the outcome had been decided and the difference in their true strength was understood. By using the flame hurled by the opponent as a catalyst, as well as not using a <Song of Praise>, to be able to call out such a heavyweight Recited creature like the manticore wasn't an ordinary power. Right now, even counting teachers, there were only a few people at this school who could actually accomplish such a thing when required.

Oratorio

Although the student indignantly showed a dangerous glare, he silently turned around and left.

After seeing him depart—

With a soft command of "Return", the man made the lion disappear amidst red light.

"I–I'm sorry! That…… Th–Thank you very much!"

"If you wish to express your thanks, you should also speak to the young lady who first assisted you."

Neight frantically lowered his head. After seeing this, the Reciter winked at Kluele.

"Oh, you two are both resting. Did you finish? That was pretty fast!"

With the lizard settled down in her left hand, Mio walked towards them. Before she could open her mouth, Kluele shook the flask at her. Even though its contents had evaporated slightly due to the sun, the amount pretty much hadn't decreased at all.

"Let me tell you, we haven't even finished once!"

"Eh?"

"A senior student whose situation I didn't really understand was causing us trouble, and he even requested a 'Contest'. Because of that, we wasted a lot of time."

"……Since you two aren't injured, that means…… you won?"

Mio gazed steadily at the two people. Faced with such an approach, Neight frantically shook his head.

“N-No, it was Kluele-san who protected me.”

[Hm. Should we be praising the little girl right now, or criticizing Neight? It truly does make one perplexed.]

Kluele ignored the lizard that was troubled by such a strange question, and replied.

“I didn’t do anything. A familiar person helped us.”

“Another person?”

Because the subject had been brought up suddenly, Mio was doubtful.

“It was a person wearing a yellow-green coat. He was amazing. Also, he seemed to have mastered both Red and Blue colors. Even though he didn’t tell us his name, I think he should be a very famous person.”

Neight’s excitement hadn’t cooled down, and the speed at which he talked was faster than usual.

After hearing that, Mio suddenly sat down on the grass.

“Yellow-green…… In other words, a coat the color of dried grass…… Proficient in more than one Recitation Color……”

“Mio, what’s wrong?”

Mio crossed her arms and looked up at the two.

“I just thought of a very famous person. However, I don’t think it would be possible for such a thing to happen. Also, no matter how I put it, it would be impossible for that person to be here.”

“Who are you talking about?”

After hearing the question, she only shook her head and replied unimportantly.

“Don’t worry about it. Come on, you guys should hurry up and continue! Let Arma and I have a look also.”

***

How nostalgic……

It was the moment when the sun was about to set in the west. Looking at the setting sun whose rays entered through the laboratory window, he calmly narrowed his eyes.

The odor of medicine lightly filled the air, and the familiar testing equipment was pretty much the same as before. This was the place where students wasted most of their time. Carrying a borrowed library book in one hand , creating catalysts one after the other, and then attempting to conduct Recitations. Even though he didn't have any special feelings about campus life, this place still made him reminisce.

"Xins-kun."

After hearing the sound of someone calling his name, he turned around to face the laboratory door.

"Really, I didn't expect you to be in this sort of place. The headmaster is looking for you."

A woman wearing glasses appeared by the doorway. Her lavender-colored hair flowed as she walked.

"Long time no see, Jessica-sensei…… Ah, you are now the director of education, aren't you?"

He bowed lightly at the teacher he used to greatly respect.

"Oh my, stop that. If your fans knew that a Rainbow-Color Reciter acted like that, I would certainly be hated by them."

Unable to figure out whether she was being sincere or making a joke, he showed a wry smile.

"I'm still me. Even though I'm like this, I hope I am still the same as when I was in Elfand School."

That wasn't a lie. Ever since that time, he hadn't changed his daily habits whatsoever. His personality and use of words were still the same. Even his outward appearance, his face was extremely similar to how it looked before. For those who met him for the first time, there had been nearly nobody who could correctly guess his age.

"You were saying, the headmaster was looking for me ?"

He returned to the topic. However, she looked dismayed and shook her head.

"……Ah, there was something like that. I've recently become so absent-minded, it's terrible. Isn't it almost time for me to retire?"

"Don't say that. Instead, this is the time when you should be trying your best!"

Compared to when he had previously seen her, the teacher's eye sockets had become sunken in, making him realize how time had passed. He discreetly averted his gaze.

"It's a very important matter. The headmaster said he would be waiting for you in the resources building in front of the fourth-year school building. It's in the center of the underground first floor."

"Alright. By the way, I'm a bit curious, has this laboratory been stained with soot?"

After moving his line of sight, this was the first thing that caught his attention, and he couldn't help but feel curious.

"Not long ago, a child apparently wanted to call out a flame in here. That child had just transferred here and is only thirteen years old, so it was inevitable for him to fail .

A flame— Red Color Recitation? Although he could somewhat understand this kind of explanation, Xins still looked all around him. The whole room was covered in soot, but apart from this, the classroom wasn't abnormal. This made him think. If such a flame had been large enough to fill the whole room with smoke, then the room should definitely have been engulfed by the flame.

However, on the soot-covered objects, there were absolutely no burn marks. How come this room had been filled with smoke, but not burned?

—Had it really been a flame?

"What's wrong?"

The teacher Jessica looked at him, surprised.

……Oh, right. There was no time to think about this kind of thing right now.

"No, I was just caught up in my memories. This is really nostalgic."

It was a commonly-used excuse. Even though he felt humiliated to have said that, it was an appropriate saying at the moment.

"By the way— the day after tomorrow is the recital contest, isn't it? Can I go take a look around?"

"I was just thinking of inviting you. Who would refuse you? Ah, but it would be best to inform the headmaster about it first."

All of the students would be participating in the recital contest. With that, he would be able to confirm with his own eyes the student who created the smoke.

Once again he focused his gaze on the ceiling. It puzzled him. It really could have been the result of a flame, but in his heart he felt uneasy.

"Well then, I should get going now. It's not good to keep the headmaster waiting for so long."

Part 3

A man wearing a coat passed the third-year school building and headed towards the fourth-year building.

"……Is he that guy from before?"

Having just glimpsed him, Vendrell hid behind the fountain beside the passageway.

Wearing a coat that was the color of dry grass, it was definitely the Reciter who had interfered in the duel. That guy was strolling in a carefree manner in the campus.

But, where was that man headed?

Just when Vendrell was feeling suspicious, the man's footsteps changed the direction he was going. As if he meant to enter the fourth-year building, he walked behind it.

……Wait a minute. Wasn't that the direction of the resources building?

It was a building that was locked year-round and never opened. Calling it a resources building was simply to make it sound good, but in fact, it was merely a storage room. Even students in the fourth year of high school didn't know whether or not they would have a chance to go inside even once. Furthermore, only students who had received their teacher's trust and were going to take something out had the opportunity to enter .

He wrinkled his eyebrows while following behind the man. Because the two were separated by a distance, that Reciter shouldn't notice him. In front of the rusted door, the man's coat stopped swaying. After putting his hand on the doorknob and counting for a few seconds, the double doors opened outwards with a creaking noise. Then the man's figure disappeared into the dim resources building.

……The door opened?

He hadn't made any movements similar to using a key to open the door. In other words, there was already someone inside?

But then, why did that man need to enter the school's resources building?

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"Ahh. Like I thought, it's impossible!"

Neight cried piteously, while plopping down on the grassy field and sighing.

"Calling out a horse is really hard. Not only that, but I've only seen a real horse one or two times……"

[That's an excuse.]

Arma, who was standing on Mio's shoulder, narrowed his eyes. Was it because she didn't call him a lizard? That Recited creature seemed to enjoy being with Mio. Mio also didn't understand. Perhaps it was because she was

accustomed to Recited frogs and tortoises, that she was able to handle this type of creature. Speaking of which, even among students of the Recitation School, probably the only girl who didn't care about a lizard standing on her shoulder was Mio.

[This so-called Recitation, it is only meaningful if you are able to call out something never seen before. If it is something you have already seen, that means you should be able to visualize it when you want to. The fact that you can't even call out that sort of thing is really bothersome.]

Kluele cautiously used her fingertips to touch the preaching lizard. His skin felt rough, like she was rubbing a rock. Also, it was cold as if holding a piece of ice.

"Hey, are you actually a high-level creature?"

[How have you come to that conclusion?]

The lizard seemed to be unusually interested, and turned so that the tip of his nose pointed at her.

"Because you are able to talk, that means you are a fairly extraordinary creature, right?"

[I can be considered to be a creature of that category. But back to the topic……]

After the lizard leaped from Mio onto Neight's shoulder, he proceeded to give a complicated answer:

[Even if the level of the Recitation is low, there are still creatures able to understand the human language. However, the opposite is also true— That is, even among the highest-level creatures, there are types that do not use languages. I only wish to remind you, it is best not to differentiate based just on this.]

This equaled to him implying that he wasn't really an "extraordinary creature". Did it seem like he said that? But if those words were used as an explanation, then didn't it mean he was simply a lizard that was able to speak?

"……It's already so late."

Mio said while staring at her lengthening shadow.

Because it was blocked by the school building, the horizon couldn't be seen. However, there was red light shining from a gap between the buildings. Although they

didn't know the exact time, it was about time for school to be over, and the number of students on campus was gradually decreasing.

"Mio, what do you plan to do today? Are you going to stay and spend the night at my place?"

Although she hesitated slightly, Mio still shook her head.

"No, I told my parents that I would return home today . Ah, but since we rarely have this opportunity, let's go eat dinner together! Neight-kun should also come to the cafeteria with us!"

"Eh, but are pets allowed in there?"

After hearing Neight's gentle tone, the lizard standing on his shoulder narrowed his eyes.

[Mm, Neight, to dare to call me a pet, you must have some nerve—]

"Ah. Sorry, Arma! I didn't mean that, it's because that' s what other people will think at the sight of you. Eh…… that's…… I mean……"

Even though the lizard was facing his master Neight, it was Neight who bowed his head in apology at the lizard.

It felt like a back and forth relationship.

Looking at Mio who stood beside her, she also showed an embarrassed expression and shrugged her shoulders.

***

After he entered the room, the stifling heat that seemed like it could melt even bone marrow, changed into a comfortable cold wind that caressed his neck. In here were a variety of medicinal products, ancient books, and bones of animals he didn't know the names of. In order to preserve these resources, there was controlled air conditioning in the room so that the summer heat could not reach inside.

"—Is it forbidden sacred ground?"

As a student, it was impossible to set food in this type of resources building. In order to protect these precious resources, other than a few exceptions, no students were

allowed to enter. Even teachers and administrative staff needed a permit. The one exception was the director of education, Jessica. Even she came in here at most once a month.

……I see. The corners of his mouth curving slightly, Xins sighed.

Rather than calling it gloomy, it would be better to say dim. Although it had seemed comfortable when he first came in, but after his sweat dried, the cold wind caused goose bumps on his back. Was it the scent of medicine, or the rotting smell of animals? A hard-to-describe smell assaulted his nostrils. It seemed like it wasn't that nobody could come in here, but rather that nobody wanted to come to this sort of place. Rather than calling it a sacred ground, it would be more appropriate to call it a cursed place.

With every step, his shoes tapping against the floor made a dry and hard sound that seemed to resound throughout the entire resources building. The floor was covered with a thin layer of dust. Moving his gaze away from the rising dust, he set foot on the staircase leading to the basement.

The first floor seemed like a storage place for miscellaneous items, but starting from the basement, each floor was categorized by materials. From a cursory glance, the first basement floor was storage for catalysts used in Recitations.

"So, why did you call for me?"

"Ah, I'm really happy you came. I was waiting for you ."

The short, elderly person standing in front of him showed a gentle expression. Because he was slightly hunchbacked, he wasn't very tall. Therefore, rather than saying that he wore a brown robe, it seemed more like the robe had wrapped him up. His gentleness and lack of urgency made it hard for people to imagine that he supervised this large school of over one thousand five hundred students. However, even if he stepped back from the front lines, he would still be a Reciter that not many people knew of.

Tremia Academy's headmaster— Zea Lordfill.

"Come this way, please follow me."

The elderly man turned around while stroking his moustache.

Located in the corner of the floor, shelves of catalyst displays filled the room. After walking to the only wooden table in here, the headmaster turned around and said:

"This."

Xins moved his gaze to the five gemstones lying on the table. Red, blue, green, yellow, white were the colors of the five gemstones. By simply looking at it, they seemed to be ruby, sapphire, emerald, topaz, and opal.

Even though they seemed like gemstones, they actually weren't. Although they emitted a similar luster, they didn't have the distinctive crystal structure of gems. In this world, are there oval-shaped rubies about the size of a chicken egg?

"This is……"

"You can pick it up and take a look. It's fine if you hold it with your bare hands."

Xins picked up the green gemstone. Just when he took hold of it, the object in his hands emitted an even more dazzling radiance. This light, it resembled something he had become used to seeing. It couldn't be, the light from Recitations?

He hastily put the gemstone back down on the table. After shining for ten more seconds, it started to dim.

"Headmaster, this is……"

"It is an artificial catalyst manufactured by a research institute I have connections with. The researchers call it an <Egg>. Although the purification was a success, they said that they couldn't deal with it so they forcibly left it to us."

With a gaze that could kill, he stared at the egg-shaped object.

"What do you think?"

"……It's very dangerous."

The elderly man nodded his head.

Xins agreed with the research institute's conclusion that they weren't able to handle it. Even though it had only been a split second, he had already sensed that this catalyst was at least dangerous on two different levels.

The first was that the catalyst was too effective. Those who are experts in Recitations could determine what level a catalyst is just by looking at the radiance of the Recitation light. From what Xins had seen, compared to the catalysts he was familiar with, this could be classified as having quite an astonishing effect. If an inexperienced person was to use this catalyst to call out a flame, a small mistake could lead to a huge fire.

In addition, there was one other danger. It seemed that this kind of catalyst would "force a Recitation".

Essentially, so-called catalysts should only display their effects after the Reciter is ready. If a catalyst was to open a Recital (Channel) Gate on its own, then a Red Reciter wouldn't be able to casually put on a Red dress.[3] However, these <Eggs> possessed that characteristic. After realizing that fact, the Reciter would have to

immediately shut off her consciousness. If she was a few seconds too slow, then the Recitation could possibly go out of control.

……Really, what a bad person the headmaster is.

Without letting it show on his face, he smiled bitterly to himself. The elderly man was, in his own style, testing Xins to see whether or not he was a suitable candidate.

“The problem is how you plan to destroy it.”

The elder pretended to act dumb and looked away.

“Even if we wish to destroy it, because we don’t know what changes will happen to the energy inside the <Egg> , one wrong move could cause a large explosion. Thus, we can’t do that. If we were to bury it, we would only be delaying the consequences, so that’s off the list. Therefore , we can only follow the usual routine and slowly break it down. However, facilities that are near the school won’t work. We have to give it to a large research organization to do that.”

“So that’s why you called me?”

Xins interrupted impatiently. As he expected, the old man nodded his head.

"Correct. Although the school's workers are excellent, they are not sufficiently reliable. Among the people I am familiar with, the only one who can act immediately is you. Also, nobody should object if I entrust it to the Rainbow Color Reciter. I apologize for inconveniencing you, but would you like to help?"

"I don't mind. I'll take it to my friend's research institute to break it down."

Honestly speaking, he didn't really want to get involved in this matter. However, he couldn't keep such a dangerous thing inside the school.

"Although it isn't much of an exchange, but the day after tomorrow, could I stay and take a look around the recital contest?"

"Of course. I knew you would say that, so I've already prepared the guest room. You should just stay in the school for two or three days. There are many teachers in the school who wish to chat with you. If you have time, you should satisfy them."

After agreeing, Xins gazed at the <Egg> in front of him .

“Right, how should I deal with this? It’s okay if you leave it in my care now, but while I’m at this school, it’s probably safer keeping it here in this resources building.”

For someone to secretly enter his room while he was out at a meeting was already a common occurrence to him. Although most of the people were those who wanted to have a discussion with the Rainbow Color Reciter, the more extreme ones would even take his personal belongings.

“That’s true. Then, I’ll invite you in here again the day after the recital contest is over.”

“I understand.”

“Then let’s go out. Truthfully, I don’t like the gloomy atmosphere in here either.”

After letting out a breath, the elderly Reciter walked towards the stairs.

“Is it okay for the <Egg> to be on the table like that?”

"It would be rather inconvenient for it to be put into a cupboard and mix with other materials. Before it's handed over to you, I will take good care of the key and make sure that nobody is allowed to come in here. This type of uncomfortable place, there shouldn't be anyone intentionally running in here during the recital contest."

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"Oh no…… I left my wallet inside my backpack, which is in the classroom……"

Putting her hand in her skirt pocket, Mio grimaced. While entering the cafeteria, when she wanted to check the amount of money she had, this situation occurred.

"Mm, then I'll pay for you."

Kluele gave her a look that seemed to say "what are you saying now?" Although Mio wanted to accept her offer, she instantly remembered her personality. Afterwards, even if she wanted to return the money, Kluele would definitely use the excuse of "there's no need, it wasn't much money". Not only by allowing her

stay overnight, but if she also let Kluele lend out money, Mio would feel very apologetic in this kind of situation.

"It's okay, I'll go back and get it. You guys can go get us a spot first."

After saying that, she ran away before Kluele could open her mouth.

The cafeteria was located between the second-year building and the first-year building. It wasn't very far from the first-year building. She walked up a sloped road for a few minutes. Then, the first-year building could be seen in front of the setting sun. Although it must already be very late, because the sun set later during the summertime, the sky was still a reddish-brown color. It would still be a while before nightfall.

Entering the building, she confirmed with the clock hanging on the wall. Even if she did not need to run, she still couldn't hang around for very long. She walked down the hallway at a leisurely pace.

"Ah… The recital contest is only the day after tomorrow."

She lightly crossed her arms. Did this count as being nervous? But she felt like it didn't really matter. Because it was her first time taking part in this kind of contest since entering Tremia Academy, even she herself didn't understand her exact mood.

Only half paying attention, she walked past the other classes. There wasn't a single person in the classrooms, which meant everyone else was doing some last-minute special training at other locations.

Climbing up the stairs and arriving on the second floor , she passed classrooms E, D, and C in order. In the dark hallway, the light of the sunset that leaked out from classrooms hazily lit up her surroundings.

……Huh? Someone's inside?

She suddenly stopped. Only the door of her classroom, 1-B, was open.

"You still haven't left? Hey, I forgot something in here. "

In any case, it was surely a student from her class. After announcing her arrival, she didn't confirm the situation inside the classroom and walked right in.

—At that moment, Mio stood motionless with her body fixed in position.

Because, the person inside wasn't a student.

……Eh?

It wasn't a student, or a teacher. The man who was leaning against the window and basking in the light of the setting sun turned his head around.

It was the Reciter who wore a dry grass colored coat.

Eh, eh, wait……stop! Wha, what is this? Why would that person be in this kind of place?

"Is it……Xi……"

Although she had only seen photos, it was definitely right. The dry grass colored coat should be that Reciter's trademark. Along with his youthful appearance, he had become a person of legend, the only person to succeed in

studying all the Recitation Colors —the person she admired.

Ah, but why…… why couldn't she call out his name? I 'm an idiot……

"Oh my, I'm sorry. It would be best for this unrelated person to leave."

Did he think her silence meant she was afraid? He put his hand down and away from the window frame.

No, don't leave!

"P, Pl–pl…… Please wait!"

Facing the Reciter who was about to walk past her, she forced the sound from her throat.

"Hm?"

"May, may I ask, are you Xins Airwincle-sama?"

Even though she couldn't stop the trembling of her body, his name finally popped into her head. After hearing these words, his expression changed. Compared to before, it had become slightly gentler. Simply this

action had nearly made her mind become blank. Pinching herself behind her back, she was just able to endure it.

“My, my name is Mio. Ah, eh…… I really respect Xins-sama…… Therefore…… I’ve always wished for an opportunity to talk to you!”

“That’s no problem, I won’t run away, so I would be grateful if you let go of me.”

Eh? Let go? She didn’t understand what he was saying . Mio followed his line of sight, and her gaze froze on his coat.

His right sleeve— Involuntarily, she had tightly grabbed onto it.

"I, I’m sorry!”

“No, it’s okay. That aside, there’s no need for you to be so nervous.”

The Rainbow Color Reciter concealed his sigh, and shyly waved his hand.

But, what should she do? There was so much she wanted to say and ask, she didn't know where to start. Even more importantly, why would the Rainbow Color Reciter appear like this in a classroom after school? But if she asked him like that, would it be imposing his privacy ? Ah, no! Feeling even more curious, the words that were on her lips were just about to be spoken.

"……Actually, this school is where I graduated from."

Did he sense her question? He had hurriedly spoken.

Eh? But, how could she say it?

If Tremia Academy was the Rainbow Color Reciter's place of graduation, then it was a very important matter. It seemed that he wasn't an ordinary student like her, but part of a small handful of elites who attended this overly popular school. However, at the school's entrance ceremony, this kind of thing wasn't really mentioned. Furthermore, speaking of which, there should at least be a bronze statue of him in the school.

"No, to be precise, the school I graduated from used to be in this location."

His following words dispelled her question.

"The school I went to was Elfand Recitation School. That place didn't really consist of elites. In other words, it was just an ordinary school. About three years after I graduated, the school closed down due to operational difficulties. However, other than Elfand, there were no other Recitation Schools nearby. Therefore, the students and teachers were called here by the headmaster, and they established Tremia Academy."

After he finished speaking, he sat on the window frame. He sometimes saw his students acting in an identical manner, but the inconceivable thing was, he looked more suited to this action than other students. This wasn't because he was a Rainbow Color Reciter, but what he truly felt.

"When I was a student, my classroom was in approximately this location. Because it was very nostalgic, I couldn't help but come here and take a look."

"Here…… is it?"

However, just how many years ago was that? If the school building was obviously newly built, why would he specially choose this classroom?

"Is it the position of the sunset?"

The wind blowing into the classroom caused his golden-brown hair to ripple slightly.

"Although it has already been some time, even so, I still remember the position of the sunset…… because the scenery back then was the same as it is now."

Back then? When did this happen? When he had become a Rainbow Color Reciter? No, that's wrong, that was after he had graduated from school. In other words, to this person, there was a memory more important than when he had become a Rainbow Reciter?

"What kind of Reciter do you want to become?"

Mio's speculations were repelled by his sudden question.

"I, I want to be the same as Xins-sama……"

Rainbow Color Reciter. He had surely heard this type of response as many times as the number of stars in the

sky. To him, it was a commonly-heard, poor and ordinary answer. Even so, he showed no hateful expression, but instead smiled at her.

"It's good to set large goals. Don't aim to be like me, but rather, to surpass me. However, I hope that you remember one thing…… The things you truly want cannot be obtained using Recitations."

"Eh?"

The sudden change of topic made Mio's eyes open wide. But, what did he mean by that?

"No, now isn't the time to be talking about that kind of stuff." After saying this in a low voice, the Rainbow Reciter interrupted his own words.

"Speaking of which, have you found the thing that you said you forgot in here?"

Suddenly, she felt a pain in her chest. Oh no— it had completely flown out of her head.

Kluele and Neight were still waiting for her. Could this be considered a good opportunity, or bad luck? To have the opportunity to talk alone with the Rainbow Color Reciter, there might not be a second time.

“Did you make an appointment to meet someone?”

No— Although she wanted to say that, she really didn ’t want to tell a lie. Because I don’t want to betray my good friends Kluele and Neight.

Silently, she forced herself to move her head, which felt as heavy as lead, up and down.

“I will be in this school until the day after the recital contest, so if you have something to say, you don’t have to say it now.”

“Re–Really!”

“I promise. You are Mio-san, right? See, I already remember your name.”

In a considerably hasty manner, the girl ran down the hallway without looking back.

Alone once again in the classroom, Xins gazed at the palm of his hand.

The things you truly want cannot be obtained using Recitations—

……However, perhaps that child still doesn't understand this.

He himself had only discovered it after he had become a Rainbow Color Reciter. Or he should say, he had no choice but to admit it.

Even so, there will be a day when she realizes this, a time when she will become aware of it by herself.

"Even speaking of my own situation, it is that lonely black witch who single-mindedly and stubbornly pursues a goal."

He knew that nobody could hear him, and even if someone did hear him, nobody would understand. Nevertheless, Xins still spoke those words aloud. He hoped that someone would hear it, and hoped that someone would understand. At least, he hoped that someone would pass on this message to "her".

***

……Did they leave?

After confirming that the headmaster and the Reciter who wore a coat had both left, Vendrell crawled out of the corner of the cabinet.

After he had seen the Reciter enter the resources building, he had also sneaked in. Although he had eavesdropped on their conversation from beside the staircase on the first floor, he did not expect the guy who wore the old-fashioned coat to actually be the Rainbow Color Reciter.

He had imagined that Reciter to be older. After all, Rainbow Color Reciter was simply a name. Because he had always thought like that, he didn't even know what the famous Reciter looked like. However, it seemed that he did have the same level of strength as his reputation suggested.

When Vendrell had been giving the Night Color Recitation user a show of his strength, it was unfortunate

that he had been stopped by the Rainbow Reciter. But to escape uninjured from a duel with that monster, it could be called the luck within misfortune.

"……They were saying something about an Egg."

Although the headmaster had locked the door when he left, the unfortunate thing was, the lock could be opened from the inside.

Because he had been eavesdropping from the first floor, he had only clearly heard about half of what they were saying. However, he could guess that it was a conversation about catalysts. In addition, it was a considerably important matter. The headmaster hadn't discussed it with other teachers, but rather had specially called the Rainbow Reciter here. Exactly how important was that classified information?

—It would make anyone curious, wouldn't it?

Although he could satisfy his curiosity just by looking at it with his own eyes, the process wouldn't be that easy.

"Really, to put it in such a troublesome place!"

In order to protect the location of the catalyst, in the hundreds of cabinets, a numerous other catalysts were on display. As they say, “To hide a tree, put it in a forest.” He didn’t know how much time he would have to waste to find it.

Because the sun was setting, it was becoming hard to see in the darkness. The light entering from a window on the ceiling was becoming considerably weak. But even so , if he were to turn on the light, it would give away his location.

……Oh well. Tomorrow and the day after, I can patiently look for it.

***

“Mio, you’re so slow!”

Kluele yelled loudly at the girl running at full speed. It had been about twenty minutes since she had left to get her wallet. Normally, the round trip shouldn’t take more than ten minutes. Why did she take so long?

"Were you unable to find your wallet?

Mio was breathing heavily and seemed like she was unable to speak. After taking several deep breaths, she shook her head at the two of them.

"……Tha, that…… Amazing, it was really amazing!"

"—What was amazing?"

Kluele shrugged her shoulders at her friend whose cheeks had turned red in excitement.

"He was there… Xins-sama was in our classroom!"

"Eh?"

She and the boy sitting next to her simultaneously let out a noise.

"Mio, I don't understand what you mean."

"And when you say he was in our classroom—"

Before Neight had finished talking, Mio raised both her arms and yelled.

"Don't. You. Understand? Didn't Kluele just say it? She met a strong Reciter wearing a yellow-green coat. That person was actually Xins-sama!"

After saying that, the clattering sound of her chair echoed throughout the whole cafeteria.

The other students eating in the cafeteria all turned their heads to look at them. And not just the students, even the teachers and the cafeteria employees looked at them as if they were possessed.

"Ah……"

Under the gaze of several dozen people, the girl who had excitedly raised her arms was now frozen in place.

—What a stupid Mio. There was no need to yell loudly in this type of place!

With her chin resting on her hands, Kluele let out an exaggerated sigh.

Squeezing through the crowd and approaching them were two female students dressed in sportswear.

A girl who looked like a boy with tanned skin and short hair, and another girl who also belonged to the sports group with a tall figure. They were classmates Ada and Serges.

“Wait, Mio, you weren’t lying just now, were you?”

“Xins-sama is here? Where is he? Hurry up and tell us!”

The two of them both leaned forward on the table at the same time. Ada even picked up a fork and poked Mio with it. Instead of an inquiry, it could be called an interrogation.

“Uh…… um…… that’s—”

She should hurry and say she was lying. If it was now, not much harm would have been done. Although she tried to move her lips, Mio hadn’t mastered the art of reading lips. At this time, she could see more and more students gathering around her, whose mouth was hanging open.

“Is it true? I also saw that person earlier. Was it really him?”

"Me too, me too! Around the fourth-year building, right? Although I've seen him in magazines, I never expected him to be in this kind of place, so I didn't dare to call out to him! Wahh! How unfortunate!"

Kluele glanced at Mio, who looked like she was about to cry, and showed a pitying smile.

"I'm guessing four minutes. Neight, what about you?"

"……I'll say about this long."

After sweeping his gaze around, the boy who sat beside her raised three fingers.

—Well then, surrounded by pressing questions, how long could Mio withstand it?

Both of their predictions were wrong. After only one minute, Mio was forced to confess the majority of everything that occurred in the classroom.

Apparently the Rainbow Color Reciter was going to participate in the recital contest?

Merely through verbal gossip, after an hour, this rumor was spread throughout every corner of the entire campus.

Interval Play: The Wind Evokes the Dry Grass Color's Recollection

Part 1

"……Don't you think everyone worked especially seriously today?"

With a sarcastic laugh, Kluele looked out the window of the school building and surveyed the campus. It was seven-thirty in the morning. Because it was the day before the recital contest, the morning practice of clubs had been cancelled.

She had scheduled a Recitation practice with Mio and Neight, but when she came to school……

The campus was already overflowing with students. They were so densely packed that if everyone spread out their arms, they could definitely touch someone else's fingertips. There was absolutely no way to conduct a Recitation practice like this.

"Look, it's amazing over there too."

She looked in the direction of Neight's pointing finger. The visitor's entrance was decorated with multi-colored balloons and bouquets. The pathways were covered with colored tape and ribbons. Beyond that, the front gate was decorated with seven colors. It was made obvious to the public. All in all, everywhere they looked was decorated with the colors of the rainbow. This clearly expressed the intentions of the students.

"I'm sorry for making you wait. Eh, am I late?"

[Thirty minutes late.]

The lizard on Neight's shoulder spat out those words at Mio, who had entered the classroom out of breath.

"That's because on my way to school, the road was very crowded! Although most of them were people wearing our school uniform, why is everyone coming so early today?"

—Because of you! However, now wasn't a good time to remind her of that.

"What should we do about the practice?"

The lizard that had been on his shoulder, Neight now carefully carried in his arms.

“There’s no way to practice like this. It seems to be because of a certain someone’s grand announcement.”

“That’s true. It was really grand, everyone’s looking forward to it!”

She said carelessly to Mio. ……Seriously, this airhead.

She scowled at the perpetrator beside her, but the girl didn’t notice.

Part 2

“The recital contest is tomorrow. After this event finishes, summer vacation will start. Because it’s the final activity, everyone should try their best! Are the preparations complete?”

Holding the attendance book, the teacher Kate opened the window of the classroom.

"By the way, I have important news. Although famous Reciters are invited to the recital contest every year, the person attending tomorrow will be—"

"You're too slow! Sensei, everyone knew about that a long time ago!"

Ada, who sat in the back, interrupted excitedly. Instead of the fork that she had used yesterday to interrogate Mio with, the girl now waved a pen at the teacher.

"……Well, I think."

The news she had wanted to declare was already announced, causing Kate to hang her head disappointedly.

"However, because the headmaster asked me to pass this on to everyone, I will still say it. Anyway, the Rainbow Color Reciter Xins-san will also be watching everyone's performances tomorrow. Other than various awards, he will also give out a special prize, so please look forward to it."

The Rainbow Reciter will be awarding something personally!

Shouts of joy filled the classroom. Glancing behind her , Kluele saw Mio, Ada, and Serges raising their fists in a triumphant pose. It seemed that they sincerely wanted to win that prize.

……However, because of something like that, there are students like yesterday’s dishonorable upperclassman.

What did the victim think about it— Just when that thought flashed through her mind, she saw Neight, who was sitting in a corner of the classroom, frantically trying to close his schoolbag. It seemed that flying lizard was finally unable to contain himself, and wanted to leap out of the bag and cause trouble.

“Hey, Kluele.”

From behind her, a hand suddenly stretched forward. It was Serges. She was holding a small slip of paper that appeared to be a note often passed between female students. “Keep passing it forward.” Kluele nodded gently at this command uttered in a quiet voice.

The contents were as she had expected. It asked if everyone wanted to plan a time to sneak out and go take a look at the guest room where the Rainbow Color Reciter was staying.

……Well, I understand how everyone feels.

She herself had already met him once and even exchanged a few words with him, but most of the students hadn't even seen him yet. They couldn't help but be curious.

However, is it okay if I don't go? Kluele didn't sign her name on the slip of paper, but let it continue to be passed forward.

Because Mio's name wasn't on it. Although she wanted to thank him again for what happened yesterday, there would still be time to thank him tomorrow. If he were to remember her name and appearance but she failed tomorrow, it might cause the opposite effect. That was something she didn't want to experience.

"Well then, I'm sorry but I have to ask everyone to help decorate. Because I have to discuss matters about tomorrow, I will be very busy today. Even though I will be unable to help, I wish you all good luck!"

Because it was the day before the recital contest, all of the students had to help with decorating the school building. Even though the tasks had already been distributed at an earlier time, they could be changed freely to where help was needed. Being able to roam freely was where the problem lay.

……I can't guarantee what everyone will work on.

Kluele quietly spoke to the homeroom teacher about this.

***

tap tap A light knocking noise sounded on the door of the headmaster's room.

"—Excuse me."

This noise made the headmaster lift his head.

A female teacher wearing a pure white suit slowly opened the door.

“Is it Enne?”

The woman emitting a calm mood nodded slightly. She held a few documents in her hand.

“The program for the recital contest is finished…… I apologize for only finishing it yesterday.”

“No, no, don’t worry about it.”

The timetable, guests, and hosts. These important matters were more or less confirmed.

At the end of the guest list was the Rainbow Color Reciter’s name. Because they had to add the name of this sudden guest at the last moment, the program was submitted late.

“By the way, how are the students doing?”

"There are many excellent students this year as well. Since they all have worked hard, there should be considerably outstanding results."

She smiled calmly. Her definite expression showed that she must be quite confident.

"That's true. I hope they all try their best, especially the higher-grade students."

Although first-year students had the attitude of joining the fun, to higher-grade students about to graduate, especially those who wanted to continue in the Recitation field of study, there wasn't anything more significant than this event. As long as they could show some results in this recital contest, there would be many famous Reciters and research institutes scouting for people. To the students, this event was like an exam for employment . Students like that were currently occupying any open spaces on the campus and making their final preparations.

"Every year at this time, when I see the students acting so dedicated, I remember the time when I was a student. "

The woman quietly stared out the window at the campus, and gave a faint smile.

“I…… The reason why I wanted to become a Reciter was because I wanted to call out a Pegasus. A long time ago, I had been seriously injured, and the road to the hospital was too far…… But at that moment, a Reciter who happened to be passing by called out a Pegasus. He let me ride on the horse’s back and took me to the hospital…… Words can't express how happy I felt. That’s why—”

In the center of the campus, several students were engaged in a discussion. As well, under the shade of a tree in the distance, there were students conducting Recitations with the supervision of a teacher. She gazed at the scene with a nostalgic expression.

“Another time, I hope to be carrying out that kind of duty.”

Her peaceful demeanor made others think of her as frail. However, in her eyes and tone of voice, she possessed the dignity and pride of a Recitation instructor .

After gazing for a few seconds at the scene outside the window—

"……Well then, I also have to make some final confirmations with the students. I will take my leave for now."

Reluctantly breaking the silence, she turned around.

"Mm. Because you are now in the position of a Recitation instructor, I will trust you."

After silently nodding her head, the teacher wearing a white suit departed from the headmaster's room.

"Mio-san, is this part okay like this?"

"Eh…… Move it a bit to the left. Ah, or is it to the right ….. No, move it up a bit."

It was the top of the main gate of Tremia Academy. Neight was currently standing on top of two folding chairs, reaching his arms up to hang a ribbon on the peak of the gate. Mio supervised the scene. Even though she usually had a rough and sloppy personality, starting from a moment ago, she repeatedly gave strangely detailed instructions.

“Ah, seriously, Kululu. Be more careful!”

This time she’s even ordering me around. Kluele was in charge of making the ribbon into flowers. She was about to give it to Neight to hang up, but the supervisor seemed to be dissatisfied with the finished product.

“But anyway, isn’t it only for tomorrow? I think it’s already good enough.”

“No— Xins-sama might pass through here.”

With her hands on her hips, Mio puffed up her cheeks.

“It’s okay. Even if he does see it, it will only be for a second..... Eh…… Mio? What’s wrong?”

Before she had finished her words, Kluele began to doubt her eyesight.

A lonely expression had suddenly appeared in Mio's eyes.

"……Xins-sama, he has especially profound memories about this school."

Kluele's heart was filled with doubt. She didn't remember ever hearing about such a thing.

Yesterday, when she was being interrogated in the cafeteria, Mio never mentioned anything about that. Kluele thought that Mio had been forced to tell every single detail about the matter. She didn't expect her to have concealed something.

"Did you hear about that when you two met yesterday ?"

She thought Mio would still keep it a secret, but Mio nodded her head honestly. She cautiously lowered her head and spoke in a quiet, almost inaudible voice.

"Although I don't really understand the situation…… But, I can clearly sense that this school is very important to him. He took the trouble to come to this school…… That's why I hope to leave him with some more wonderful memories."

Her cheeks turned deep red. Ah, Kluele finally understood the reason why Mio refused Serges's invitation and instead came here to decorate the school building.

……Well, it can't be helped.

Kluele picked up the ribbon beside her hand and continued making a flower out of it.

"Yes, yes, I understand. I will make it so beautiful that nobody can complain about it."

Part 3

"Xins, why are you wearing a coat instead of a robe?"

With her silk-like hair blowing in the wind, the young lady said in a singsong voice.

“Wearing a robe will make me look like a Reciter. How should I say it, I don’t want to be grouped together with them. Therefore, if I don’t wear a robe, I will be considered by people as ‘one of the Reciters seen everywhere’.”

The school had a large campus, and they were on a roof from where the whole campus could be seen.

As long as they pick the right time, there would be nobody else in this kind of place. Alone on here, he would be able to quietly spend the time before school was dismissed. To Xins, this space was one of the few locations where he could rest.

……However, when had it started?

More and more often, Evhemary’s figure had begun to appear on this rooftop.

“So you want to be conspicuous.”

She covered her smile with her hand. To anyone looking, her movement could be called a sneer rather than a smile. But the young man didn’t mind, because he knew that it was just her style.

“It was your influence.”

At a place where he had originally hoped for nobody to appear, someone other than him showed up. However , for some reason, she was the only one he permitted. Rather, in the depths of his heart, he even hoped that she could come again next time.

“I also hope that someone will remember me.”

“Oh…….”

She responded appropriately as if it were a play.

“However, even if you did wear a coat, this deep blue color isn’t eye-catching enough. You should wear a more conspicuous color.”

With a blunt look, she handed him the shopping bag she held in her left hand.

"This is?"

"For you. My parents had bought it for me, but as far as I'm concerned, it's too big. Because both males and females can wear it, I think it can probably fit you."

He reached into the bag and took out the object inside. It was a coat of a color that seemed to be a mix of deep green and cream yellow. As for the size, the sleeves would be a little long if he wore it, although it was definitely too big for her.

At any rate, it was really a sudden, unique present. Xins suppressed a laugh in his chest, but soon after, he shook his head strongly in his heart.

……No, I'm such an idiot.

Because of his misjudgment, he was lost for words. To him, it was already an unimportant matter. Although that was the degree of his awareness, however— Isn't today my birthday?

Something that he had forgotten, Evhemary remembered?

"Did you know that today was my birthday?"

As if she was feigning ignorance, she replied in an unfazed voice.

“Is it? Even though it’s a coincidence, couldn’t this be regarded as just the right time?”

Her expression was the same as always, cold as if she was in a distant place. ……At this time, wouldn’t blushing slightly be the proper reaction of a girl her age?

“Can I try it on?”

“Go ahead. I already gave it to you, so do as you please.”

Sure enough, it’s too big for me to wear. Just when he wanted to laugh bitterly at his clenched fist in the sleeve — Xins caught his breath. He noticed that the tips of his fingers were exposed past the cuff of the coat. The price tag on the sleeve had been forgotten and was still hanging there.

The sale date was stamped on the price tag. That date was…… yesterday.

“What’s wrong?”

The young lady stared at him in puzzlement.

What should he say? Would it be more polite to pretend not to have found the price tag, or should he accept it as a birthday present?

“It’s nothing…… Evhemary, thank you. This coat is really warm.”

After he worried about it, he decided to choose the former. He would accept something as a birthday present when she gave it to him for that purpose.

Soon after, the young man found that it was the right choice.

“You’re welcome. After all, my parents bought it for me, but I can’t wear it.”

It seemed that the sound of her voice was slightly more shy than usual.

This is fine. If she is acting the same as usual, then I will do the same. Because surely that’s the unspoken rule between us.

Since then…… How many years has it been?

Actually, simply by counting on his fingers, he could immediately get that number. It hadn't been a very long time. However, from his point of view, the amount of time that had passed was similar to an eternity.

Wearing the dry grass colored coat, Xins stood on the roof of the guest building. Beside him, on what had long ago become the designated seat, the figure of the person he was waiting for wasn't there.

"Where…… are you?"

A sigh mixed in with his voice. His monologue was swept away by the wind.

After he had graduated middle school, when he was choosing a high school, the two of them had chosen different schools. But there would inevitably be a time when one of their names would be spread throughout the entire world. At that time, the person who had been surpassed would go meet the other. That is what they agreed on.

After he entered high school, for one year, two years, Xins studied Recitations at an astonishing speed. While he was in high school, he studied three colors. After he graduated, there were numerous research institutes scouting for recruits. He had become known as an unprecedented genius, and there was nobody in that profession who didn’t know his name.

On the other hand, the name of the young lady who used Night Color Recitations still hadn’t been heard throughout the world. And then, on the day he had become the Rainbow Color Reciter.

Many friends and teachers had come to his side— But her figure was not among them.

What had happened to her? No, more importantly, he didn’t even know whether she was still safe and sound.

'By that time, I would already be dead.'

The heartfelt words she had revealed— In his mind, he recalled her sorrowful face in profile.

“I can’t meet the person I want, I can’t call out the person I want. Reciters like us, why do we exist?”

With that meaning, those words were more unsuitable for coming out of his mouth than anyone else's. If it was known that the Rainbow Color Reciter had spoken those kinds of words, what expression would common people have?

"……Hey, Evhemary. Have I still not received your approval?"

He did not receive a reply. The coat, which was smaller now compared to back then, swayed in the wind. Looking up at the sky, the Rainbow Color Reciter closed his eyes.

3rd Play: The Beginning and the Promise's Opera

Part 1

It was the day of the recital contest.

Just when she opened the door of the first-year females change room, she discovered……

……Wah, what's this?

Before she had even walked in one step, the choking smell of perfume made Kluele stop her footsteps. In other words, the perfume's smell was so strong that even a girl herself wanted to retreat from it.

"Ah, Kluele, good morning— I'm here first today!"

Mio was putting her uniform in a locker. It seemed that she didn't mind the smell of perfume.

"Good morning, everyone's all so early today."

Even Ada and Serges, who were usually late, were already in the change room.

"It's you who's too slow. Oh right, you're the 'King of arriving late'!"

While putting on lipstick, Ada raised her eyebrows.

"Eh…… Kluele, could it be that you want to wear your uniform onstage today?"

Faced with stunned expressions, Kluele raised the bag that she held in her hands and showed everyone.

School uniforms were usually required in Tremia Academy, but the recital contest was one of the few opportunities where everyday clothes were allowed. Nearly one hundred percent of female students would dress up. Due to six hundred fifty female students all wearing their most beautiful clothes, a fashion show is held every year at this time. As for males, half of them would wear tailcoats, thirty percent would wear a Reciter-style robe, and the rest would wear jackets or coats.

"……Wearing a dress will only make your shoulders stiff."

Actually, Kluele had originally planned to participate in the recital contest wearing her school uniform, but the senior students at yesterday's club activity had preached to her about this matter for two hours.

No, Kluele! To participate while dressed up prettily should be the intention of female students. Even if your goal is to become a Reciter, it will be the end if you forget about this! Also, you are tall to being with, and you have a good body figure. Are you going to just let go of this chance? Honestly speaking— that's the situation you're in.

—Speaking of chances…… Exactly what chance is this ?

Finally, under the threats and powerful persuasion of the senior students, she had decided to take out the dress hidden in the depths of her closet.

"Hey, Kluele, look. Don't you think this looks really good?"

Wearing her underclothes, Mio proudly lifted up her own dress. It was pearl-colored and had been modified with prisms so that from the angle of the audience, it would shine with seven colors.

"Wow, that's really pretty!"

It was brand new with not a single crease in it. After finding out that Xins Airwincle was coming, she must have hurriedly bought it yesterday. Also, to have it specially match with his title of Rainbow Color Reciter, this really seemed like something Mio would do.

"It certainly is pretty, but Mio, isn't that too flashy?"

Watching her put on the dress in the crowded room and spin in a circle for everyone to admire, Serges cleaned up her makeup and interrupted.

"There certainly are many students wearing fancy clothing, but last year, apparently many of them received a warning! In addition, those who wore overly exposing clothing were also warned….. Ah, but you don't need to worry about that point, Mio. Because in terms of body figure, you still have a long way to go—"

"Ahh, you actually dare to say it! I still care about that!"

Mio pouted. This action seemed completely childish, but nobody dared to point it out.

"Mio, you can head off first. I probably still have to take some time."

"Okay. Then, I'll go to the campus first. There's only thirty minutes left until the opening ceremony, so you should hurry up!"

Carrying dress shoes the same color as her dress, Mio jogged out of the change room.

Following after Mio, Ada and Serges also left, but in a considerably more graceful manner. Kluele thought that they usually only cared about sports, but she didn't expect they would also be skilled in putting on makeup.

Even a small change can make someone seem greatly different than usual. But Mio still lacked this aspect. Kluele let out a laugh while taking her dress out of the bag.

Alright, next was the major problem.

……This dress, how do you put it on?

Part 2

On one corner of the square campus. When Kluele arrived at the meeting place of first-year students, the students had already finished lining up according to their classes. At the very end of the 1-B line, was a boy who was a head shorter than the students around him.

"Ah, Kluele-san, good morning."

Kluele waved in response to Neight, who was wearing a dark blue robe. The size of the robe was too big, so it didn't fit him very well. Even so, it certainly gave him the outward appearance of a Reciter.

"Good morning. The weather is great today."

There wasn't a single cloud in the sky. Extremely dazzling sunlight forced everyone to their eyes.

"Found you, found you! Kluele, and Neight-kun is here also!"

She turned to face the voice coming from behind her. Several meters behind, Mio and Serges were coming closer.

"We went looking for you, but it seems like we missed you."

"……Speaking of which, Kululu—"

Mio stared fixedly at Kluele.

"What?"

"Nothing. I was just thinking, Kluele's body figure really is great. It's really suited for wearing a dress."

"Eh?"

Mio had suddenly said those nonchalant words. Furthermore, there was a boy standing beside her. Would an average person say something like that? Just when that notion crossed her mind, even Serges began to nod, "Yeah, yeah!"

"Also, the dress you're wearing looks pretty good, let me admire it for a moment— Ah, wow! It's an open back dress!"

Mio, who had circled around behind her, let out an exaggerated shout.

"……I only have this dress, so it can't be helped."

Kluele wore a mermaid-style dress.

A swath of pure white cloth was the main material, with vertical streaks of blue coming down from the left shoulder. A heavier part of the collar hung down as decoration. It seemed that this dress was originally meant to be worn to dances. Like the name of a mermaid suggested, this dress had a close-fitting design, so that even if you didn't want to, it would still reveal the curves of your body.

However, it seemed that showing the curves of her body wasn't too bad.

"Mio, don't worry. It's too bad that my opponents are too strong."

Serges surveyed her while nodding.

"This kind of high-quality material is very rarely seen, especially the chest and the waist's—"

"That's enough, Serges. If you keep going…… I'm going to get angry!"

Before she had finished speaking, Kluele moved her face in front of Serges's nose. Even if she was praising her, why must she say it in front of so many people?

Just when Kluele turned around to escape the gazes of people around her—

[Really? I don't think there's much difference between her physical body—]

She didn't know when, but the lizard on Neight's shoulder had slowly lifted up its head.

……How should she respond at a time like this? It would be regrettable to agree, but denying it would earn comments from Mio and Serges.

"Ah, ah! Arma, you shouldn't talk!"

Neight wanted to hurriedly cover its mouth, but the lizard easily broke free from his grip.

[I think I've heard that voice somewhere before.]

"……What, is this lizard talking?"

Serges glanced at the lizard, astonished.

"He's Neight's pet."

To retaliate, Kluele quickly added that sentence.

[Hey, little girl—]

The reptile hadn't finished speaking, when the sound of the clock declaring the beginning of the opening ceremony resounded throughout the campus.

Part 3

"This is a general announcement. All students, please gather quickly at your designated locations."

The recital contest was divided into two parts, morning and afternoon. The morning was for the performance of White and Green colors. Students specializing in those two colors began to make their way to the center of the campus— The administrators and judges moved to the front.

Students specializing in Green went to the right side of the headquarters, while those specializing in White gathered on the left side. Five Reciters challenged each other at a time. Mio was in the sixth group. As for her other classmates, Ada, who specialized in White, was in the fourteenth group.

"Good luck—"

After hearing Neight's encouragement, Mio waved her hand as she walked to the center.

"What does Mio plan to call out?"

"She said it would be something large and worth seeing."

[Speaking of large Green animals…… A wyvern?]

The lizard said, completely missing the point.

"Don't talk nonsense!"

A dragon was considered to be Green's High Noble Aria First Scale Recitation. Even to the famous Reciters currently acting as judges, it was a very challenging

Recitation. If a first-year student could call out that kind of creature, it would ruin the reputation of the grown-ups. First-year students, including Kluele, could only conduct Fourth Scale Recitation. To call out something large—a normal creature that could not understand human speech—was already very difficult. This was something even Mio could not change. She should know the amount of strength that she herself has.

Common Aria

"I'm really looking forward to it."

"It will be fine as long as she doesn't get too nervous in front of the judges."

……If I remember correctly, Mio is unexpectedly weak at performances.

In accordance with her prediction.

Because that Rainbow Color Reciter was a judge, students who were too nervous and failed their Recitations appeared one after the other. It wasn't just first-year students, there were even many higher-grade students whose concentration was broken and they had to urgently lower their planned Recitation by one rank.

Also, this was also within the predictions—The Rainbow Color Reciter Xins Airwincle also caused the unusually enthusiastic Mio to be a part of that group.

"Aaaaah! I'm too embarrassed to keep on living!"

Sure enough, she had turned out like that. Sighing, Mio pulled up her dress and sat down on the ground. Because Kluele was also wearing a dress, she couldn't make any large movements. Unable to do anything else, she waved her hand and called Neight beside her.

"It's alright, stop crying. Hey Neight, help me pull her up."

According to Mio, who had large teardrops in her eyes , she had been able to concentrate smoothly in the beginning. However, when the Recital Channel Gate opened, she made eye contact with "Xins-sama". Her memory after that was blank for ten seconds…… When she was back in control of her body, the Recital Channel Gate had already closed, and she was disqualified because of surpassing the time limit.

"Now I've definitely failed Xins-sama."

With both Kluele and Neight pulling at the same time, they finally made the girl start to walk forward unsteadily.

"So, Mio. What did you want to call out?"

Mio sobbed and replied in a tearful voice.

"Um, a Quetzalcoatl." [4]

……Quetzalcoatl?

"Mio, are you serious?"

"Yeah."

……Oh, I see. So it's like that.

Suddenly, Kluele let go of Mio's hand. Because Mio had been holding on and Kluele had let go without any warning, she lost her balance and wildly tumbled to the ground.

"Wait, wait a moment…… Kluele, you're terrible!"

"Neight, you don't need to keep pulling. Come, let's leave. Ignore this kind of person."

Ignoring the girl pouting behind her, Kluele walked away. Ah, it was really stupid of her to feel slightly sympathetic.

A Quetzalcoatl is classified as a subspecies of dragon. Of course, it was considered as a First Scale Recitation, so it was impossible for Mio to succeed. At least she had succeeded in making eye contact with the Rainbow Color Reciter.

High Noble Aria

[Neight, what are you planning to do?]

The Night Color lizard being held in Neight's left hand dangled down its tail.

"I want to try calling out the black horse. This is a rare opportunity, so I want to challenge myself and see what happens."

"What time is Neight starting?"

Because Night Color Recitation isn't an official Recitation Color, Neight had obtained special permission to join the performance with the Red Recitations. This was something that their teacher, Kate, had directly requested from the headmaster.

"I think it's the twenty-first group in the afternoon."

"Ah, that's right."

Kluele was in the afternoon's twentieth group. Based on the program, the time when she exits the stage would be just when Neight begins performing.

"I see. Our times overlap, so we might not be able to see each other's performance."

"Even if I won't see it, Arma will watch Kluele-san's performance for me."

For some reason, she felt pleased but also unhappy.

—Eh?

Suddenly, a peculiar feeling appeared in her body.

Her body began to tremble slightly, and as the time of her performance approached, she shuddered harder.

Am I nervous? How strange, something like this has never happened before.

"I'm sorry, but can I be excused for a while? This is a rare opportunity, so I want to practice a bit before my time comes."

"Yes, go ahead."

Neight waved his hand, the one that Arma was climbing on.

"The afternoon performances are about to begin. Students in the fourteenth group, please gather at the entrance. I repeat, Students in the fourteenth group, please proceed to the entrance—"

From far away, the students called by the speaker could be seen gathering. The program was progressing smoothly since no accidents had happened, and it was still on time with the schedule.

In a corner of the campus, Kluele tightly closed her eyes and sat on a wooden chair under the shade of a tree. Her hands were placed on her knees, and she was repeatedly visualizing the Recitation process. She

imagined herself in the midst of a chaotic red world. Like sewing a piece of clothing out of a single thread, she wove the vague image into a concrete vision.

However, even after trying that several times, that thread would always snap midway. In the very end, before she could call out "that", her concentration suddenly broke.

……Why?

Because of her anxiety, the speed of her eyes blinking naturally became faster. Why? It certainly wasn't a very difficult Recitation. She had succeeded in it both yesterday and the day before, and she could even do it this morning. However, just before the official performance, she was suddenly unable to conduct a Recitation.

[You are troubled.]

Someone's voice sounded from beside her, where there should be nobody. Also, it was quite close to her. Keeping her head motionless and moving only her gaze, she saw that on the bench she was sitting on— The Night Color lizard sat calmly on the other end.

"You were too loud just now—"

[You are unable to enter the state of concentration for conducting a Recitation.]

Perking up his nose, he gazed at Kluele's face.

"I'm just slightly worked up, that's all. Please be a bit quieter—"

[Do you want to stay like this for your whole life?]

……For my whole life?

The declaration that sounded like a death penalty left Kluele speechless.

[Little girl, you are torn between two things. It is a conflict between growth and stagnation. Just like a little bird that wants to break free of its shell, but is unable to come out.]

The tone of the Night-colored judge sounded unchanged from how it usually was. Despite being a voice that she had only recently become familiar with,

those words lingered in her mind and wouldn't leave. She usually wouldn't take those matters seriously, but that was impossible right now.

[Before, you had high standards for yourself. It meant that no matter what you did, it would be completed without difficulty. For this next performance, you planned to carry it out smoothly, steadily, and without taking any risks because you would certainly succeed even without them. However, after seeing Mio's Recitation, after sensing the effort Neight puts in, you started to feel confused about your way of thinking.]

That golden pupil like a crescent moon made her feel pressured even if she didn't want to.

"……You sure talk a lot."

Was she resisting the strong pressure? Under circumstances that she didn't even understand, the Night-colored lizard's pupils intertwined with her gaze.

[The thing that you're gripping preciously in your hands, is it a catalyst?]

The pair of crescent moons focused on her hands, which rested on her knees. After letting out a sigh, Kluele uncurled her fingers. The tube of paint with a red label stuck on it rolled in her hands.

"I need it when I'm Reciting. Isn't it obvious?"

[Really? I think that is the cause of your troubles.]

Still sitting on the other end of the chair, the Night-colored Recited creature declared airily.

[Paint is a very convenient catalyst, even I know that. So you plan to use it as a catalyst, and perform a safe and steady Recitation. However, isn't the situation of the recital contest different from what you originally expected?]

Kluele didn't intend to reply, because the lizard hadn't finished talking. She sensed that he would continue speaking.

[Is he called Xins? In order to earn his recognition, some people bravely tried to challenge themselves, Mio included. As for Neight, even though he doesn't have that intention, he is brave enough to keep on accepting

failures for the sake of completing his promise. These accumulated failures are so that one day, he will definitely be proficient in Night Color Recitations. In this performance, Neight wanting to call out a black horse is a great example. Even though he clearly knows that he simply doesn't have that kind of ability.]

From somewhere far away came the sound of a clock. Kluele could clearly feel those words pounding heavily on her heart.

However, it didn't arouse her curiosity or excitement. It was probably because the lizard did not show any personal emotions. He didn't have the intention of criticizing or mocking her. Just like looking in a mirror, he was simply informing her.

[Under these circumstances, you only have to use a simple catalyst to conduct a simple Recitation, and be done with it. After comparing someone else's attitude of challenging themselves to your attitude, it makes you feel suffocated.]

The tube of paint slipped out of her hands.

[Do you want to withdraw into your shell once more, or struggle to escape? That is something you have to decide.]

Having finished speaking, he lapsed back into silence.

She didn't know how much time passed like that. Even though it may have only have lasted a few breaths, it felt like the weariness of sitting for a few hours straight.

Finally, just when the sunlight spilling out from gaps in the forest caused her to squint, a soft voice flowed out through the speakers.

—Students in the twentieth group, please gather at the entrance. I repeat……—

……It was time.

Without looking down at her feet, staring only at the place which she was about to leave, Kluele stood up.

[Aren't you going to pick it up?]

As if waiting for her to take a step, an inquiring voice called out from behind her. The voice was imbued with a slight intonation, and she didn't need to turn her head to know that he was teasing her. Therefore, there was no need to stop her footsteps or turn around.

—I just need one word, to reply to that.

"I don't need it, you can have it."

Without turning around, Kluele declared in a low voice. She didn't stop walking, and moved forward without waiting for Arma's reply.

[That's good. You've figured it out, haven't you?]

Hearing that voice which barely held back a smile, was like receiving a push from behind.

"Ah, I found you, Kluele! Where did you run off to? It's almost your turn."

Kate and Mio had been standing in front of the entrance for a long time. After nodding at the teacher Kate, Mio's expression finally relaxed.

"You're here, Kluele. That's a relief. Since you hadn't come back, I was feeling worried."

The four people other than her had been gathered at the front gate for a long time already. There was a girl wearing a red dress to be used as a catalyst. Another person seemed to be planning to use fire as a catalyst, thus was holding a torch in one hand. All of them had their catalysts ready.

"Kluele, where's your catalyst?"

"Don't worry, I have it."

Because she didn't have anything, Kluele clenched her fist.

—Red group twenty, please move to the performance site—

The spectators and judges welcomed them with applause. She could see several hundred, several thousand people staring at them.

But I must stay calm.

Even though she said that, the nervous feeling felt rather comfortable. While feeling the beat of excitement in her chest, she advanced forward. She felt calm and peaceful like the lakeshore in midwinter. The feeling overflowed endlessly like a fountain of spring water.

She stopped her footsteps in the middle of the campus. The applause faded away, and the surrounding noise quieted down. Kluele entrusted herself to the world of resounding silence whispered by the wind.

'You are unable to enter the state of concentration for conducting a Recitation.'

Right now, that nagging lizard was surely watching her.

'Do you want to withdraw into your shell once more, or struggle to escape?'

……I won't thank him.

After curling the corners of her mouth slightly, Kluele closed her eyes. I won't thank him, because I wasn't really moved by his words. I'm not honest enough to take strength from those abstract words.

But even so, she had made a firm resolution.

Resound from within the deep red
[—sheon lef ped-l-clue riren-c-soan]

I will call out the thing I want to recite. It doesn't matter if I fail. Regardless of whether I succeed or fail, I can swell up my chest, go to the place where everyone is, and report it to them.

Praise (you) your name
YeR be orator Lom nehhe

Red, Shameful (gentle), Pitiful (beautiful)
lor besti redi ende keofi-l-lovier

Floating in the gentle breeze (drifting) Fragments of pure scarlet piling up
Hir qusi clue lemenet feo fulleftia sm jes glue I

Slowly, as if teaching a child, she sang the <Song of Praise (Oratorio)>.

Turn from an image to a vision. Sing, weave, open a Recital Gate (Channel) to the object I seek.

Weave a song to the beyond, My thoughts pile up and perform (dance)
melodia fo Hio, O ect ti hear Yem sophit

If the world desires you……
ife I she cooke Loo zo via

Come, Be born, O child
Isa da boema foton doremren

A cheering noise sounded in her surroundings. It seemed that one person, or even several people, had succeeded in their Recitation. But don't rush. Surely there is enough time. Surely I can do it.

'Kluele-san is definitely suited to becoming a Reciter.'

……Neight, your words from that time, can I believe them?

The beyond becomes a lady, Numerous dancing, gathering dancers
[O evo Lears— Lor besti bloo-c-toge = ende dence]

Opening her eyes, red light swirled in the center of her hands. The light slowly strengthened, gradually engulfing her body. This is my identity as a Reciter, the first Recitation I ever conducted.

Flashing, the red light cracked open.

——[Red Song Keinez]——

In that instant, as if flowing from the girl's hand, countless deep crimson feathers flew out.

It wasn't a bird, but a Recitation purely for calling out those feathers.

It could have been hundreds or thousands. An innumerable amount of feathers were swept up by the wind, covering her figure.

It was as if they were blessing her, embracing her.

Each and every feather was like a red fairy. The objects receiving praise— The things summoned by the girl were very pitiful and illusionary, just like the "Crimson World " itself.

A gust of wind blew through the campus. With a *zaa* noise, the red wind surrounded the campus. Like red snowflakes, the enchanting feathers fell on the seats of spectators, the bodies of surrounding students, and the guests sitting in the judges' seats.

……Ah……

Finally remembering to breathe, the depths of her heart felt burning hot. The red color enveloped the campus, and even now, feathers still floated in the sky. Compared to a bird, calling out feathers was not challenging at all. However, it was her first time attempting to call out such a large amount. Because it had been successful, she felt a weight lifted off her heart.

—But…… Why?

With her fingers, she gently picked up a feather that had landed on her right shoulder.

It was precisely the scarlet feather that she had imagined. However, the feather before her eyes was surrounded by flame. Could this flickering radiance be an illusionary thing of this world?

I definitely hadn't planned to call out this kind of flaming feather.

……Flaming feathers. No…… Flames in the shape of feathers.

Even though it was burning, it didn't feel hot. This is……

Before she finished thinking about the question, Kluele glanced all around her.

An unnatural silence enveloped her surroundings.

Eh? What's wrong? Had something bad happened—

At that instant, Kluele's eardrum nearly ruptured.

The applause was like a storm, along with unprecedented cheers. Wave after wave of applause sounded. But, why are they clapping?

She instinctively wanted to clap with them, but then realized that everyone's gaze was focused on her.

Amidst the thunder-like applause that had not yet quieted down, Kluele returned to her seat among the spectators. Mio came running towards her.

"Kululu, you were amazing! That was really pretty!"

"Really? I don't even remember what I did."

In any case, she had been absorbed in what she was doing. Although it wasn't like Mio had done, she truly didn't have memories of what had happened.

[What did you use as a catalyst?]

The unusual creature on Mio's shoulder asked in an inquiring voice.

Seeing it once is better than hearing about it a hundred times. Before she replied, she held the ring on the pinky of her left hand close to his nose, and let him observe it in detail. Under the light, the gem embedded in the ring emitted a bright red glow. It was a ruby. Although it was an imitation, it still produced extremely good results when used as a catalyst. Until now, she had never succeeded at conducting a Recitation using the gem as a

catalyst, so she originally hadn't planned to use it this time.

"Actually, I only wore it because it was fashionable."

Once it is used as a catalyst, the ring would be unable to conduct any more Recitations. However, the end result had been worth that decision.

"What do you think after seeing it?"

[You were lucky that the wind was blowing. If there had been no wind, you wouldn't have gotten such applause.]

Pausing in the middle of his speech, in an unusual gesture, the lizard narrowed his eyes in happiness.

[However, if you explain it by saying that you took advantage of the wind, the result wasn't bad. It was a Recitation suited for an arrogant little girl, isn't that right ?]

"……Anyway, I still want to express my gratitude."

The lizard unexpectedly began to admire himself in a meek manner. It made her feel unusually embarrassed.

"Eh? What? You want to express gratitude to Arma?"

If she were to explain her words to Mio, then she would definitely be continuously bothered about this matter for the following week. After hesitating slightly, Kluele decided to ignore the question.

[Little girl—]

At that moment, she felt a shock on her shoulder. The Night-colored lizard had jumped onto her shoulder.

"It's rare for you to come on me."

[That's because I want to confirm one thing.]

In a voice somewhat different than a few moments ago , the lizard raised his head to look at her and said in an emotionless voice.

[Do you understand the reason why I asked you what catalyst you were going to use?]

"……Eh?"

[Really, were you not aware of it?]

He seemed surprised, but also relieved. Whichever one it resembled, he let out a sigh that seemed different from either.

[After seeing the Recitation you just conducted, I finally realized it. It seems that this little girl's Red Color Recitation appears very promising.]

"Are you complimenting my Recitation? That was because I used an exceptional catalyst, the gem."

But—

[No. Rather, it's the complete opposite.]

It was the opposite of what she had expected. Not only that, but he also shook his head.

[When you were conducting the Recitation, if the catalyst you had used was not a gem but 'something else' instead, you should still be able to call out something equally amazing.]

She totally didn't understand…… A different catalyst? Something equally amazing?

However, even before he had brought up this topic, the Night-colored lizard had already quickly returned to Mio's shoulder.

[You should think about this point yourself. Especially about Red Color Recitations, you have the same level of sensitivity as Neight's mother. That's why— In order to prevent you from becoming too complacent, you should look for the answer for yourself.]

"Well…… To be honest, I don't really understand. However…… I will try my best."

After answering vaguely, Kluele ran her fingers through her hair. This lizard's words were really too abstract. No, although the conversation itself was concrete, the contents may have been too sudden.

"Anyway, don't worry about it now. We should go watch Neight's performance."

[There seems to be no need to do that.]

The one on Mio's shoulder, who had talked, turned the tip of his nose in the direction of the campus.

……I see.

After glancing in the direction, Kluele closed her eyes and began to count the seconds. On the campus, at a distance of several meters away, thick black smoke was already rising.

"……Seems like it was a failure."

Mio muttered with a sigh. The twenty-first group's performance was apparently finished, and a boy walked unsteadily towards them. On his body, the dark blue robe was slightly too big. Because of his sagging shoulders, that robe seemed to fit him even less. Even though he knew that the chance of failure was high, he still felt upset. This kind of mood was easily understandable.

"I failed……"

There were no tears on his face, and instead he tried hard to show a smile. He sounded like he was obviously crying, but he desperately tried to deceive them so that nobody would find out.

[Neight—]

Before the Night-colored creature opened his mouth……

"Neight, you worked hard."

Kluele uncrossed her arms and gently gripped the boy's hand.

"Okay, try your best starting tomorrow!"

"……Kluele-san?"

The confused boy showed an expression even more childish than his age.

"Your goal is to fulfill your mother's promise, right? If that's the case, then you shouldn't be feeling discouraged at this stage."

The one who had given her the opportunity to advance her Recitation one step further was this boy. Because of that, she wanted to do something for this young Reciter.

"If a failure is shameful, then I would be ridiculed along with you. Therefore, do your best to accept the challenge."

The boy's hand trembled. Even so, he still met her gaze directly.

"……Thank you very much. However, I don't wish for Kluele-san to be ridiculed because of my failure."

He felt timid and frightened; it could be called a powerless strength. But even so, those hands still returned her grip.

"Therefore, next time I will try my best to have it succeed."

He hoped that nobody would find out.

Xins Airwincle pressed his incessantly trembling arms on the table. The black smoke residue that he had seen in the laboratory— He had continued to feel skeptical about it, but he didn't expect his suspicions to be true.

The black smoke hadn't been caused by a fire. Even a Rainbow Color Reciter like himself was unable to cause something like that. Rejecting other colors with a jet-black Song of Praise was the only thing impossible for a Rainbow Reciter.

Although the Recitation itself had failed, he was not mistaken. In other words—

……That was a Night Color Recitation?

Involuntarily, an inhuman sound came from his dry lips. But, why was there a thirteen or fourteen year old boy who had conducted that kind of Recitation?

"Evhemary, you……"

Although it was the middle of summer, he shivered unstoppably. The chill rising from the depths of his heart made the Rainbow Reciter pull his coat closer to his body .

Part 4

In the moment when the red sky began fading to an ashen black color, the recital contest in which more than one thousand five hundred students participated in was finally coming to an end.

"Well then. First, I want to thank each and every student for their hard work."

The voice of Tremia Academy's headmaster, who sat in the middle of the judges' seats, was broadcasted throughout the whole campus by loudspeakers.

"I had originally wanted to comment on every person's performance, but if that were to happen, it would already be dawn tomorrow before I finish speaking. Therefore, I won't discuss it here, but detailed comments will be passed on by your teachers tomorrow. Next, about announcing the student with the most outstanding achievement—"

The headmaster paused. After coughing unhurriedly at the large clock on the school building, he opened his mouth.

"Right now, it is six-thirty…… Ah, the students must be feeling hungry, right? Just like last year, a party has been prepared in the large hall beside the third-year building. All students and teachers, please go there to remove today's fatigue."

Just when the elderly man had finished speaking, all of the other students, except for the first-year students who were participating in the recital contest for the first time, began advancing to the hall with shouts of joy. Causing a

rumble to resound in the earth, the crowd of a thousand boys and girls ran forward.

"A party…… What does that mean?"

Not understanding the situation, Ada tilted her head and thought about it. The homeroom teacher crossed her arms, and with a meaningful smile, turned and replied to the student with wheat-colored skin.

"In short, the entire multipurpose hall had been turned into a dining hall. Everyone, you should all hurry and go there. Because the tradition is a buffet, if you don't hurry, the food will be eaten up."

"Eh? You should tell us about this kind of thing earlier , sensei!"

The male students hastily hurried off in the direction of the higher-grade students. A few of them even sprinted forward to overtake the crowd. After not even ten seconds, the students in the lead as well as the students falling behind entered the multipurpose hall like a tsunami.

"How should I put it…… What amazing vitality!"

Mio, who had not been quick enough to become part of the tsunami, said in a dumbfounded voice. Now, other than teachers, there were only a few other people left on the campus.

"Hey. Hurry, hurry! Kululu, let's go!"

"Yeah, yeah."

After shrugging her shoulders at Kate, who stood behind her with a wry smile, she followed after the tide of people.

***

"……Is it these?"

The <Eggs>. The five colored gemstones were placed on the table just like that.

After rummaging through the cupboards of the resources building for the past two days, he didn't expect for them to simply be placed there. He had thought that they would be carefully hidden, but it was the opposite.

"They look really beautiful."

He didn't think that they would be dangerous catalysts, so it wouldn't hurt to borrow them.

If they really were powerful catalysts, then they should be able to make even the Rainbow Color Reciter afraid. If he was able to overwhelm the legendary Rainbow Reciter, he would definitely be viewed differently around the world.

"I should really thank him for what he did yesterday."

Thus, Vendrell reached out his hand towards the <Egg >.

Part 5

"Kluele, have you tried this cake? It's very delicious!"

Ada walked towards her, carrying a plate with three identical slices of cake on it. I know it's really good, but aren't you taking too much? With a faint smile, Kluele shook her head.

"I'm already full. As for desserts, just this is enough for me."

Kluele shook her glass of orange juice in reply.

"Kululu, have you seen Xins-sama?"

Pushing through a crowd of people, Mio asked loudly. She held a cup of what seemed like grape juice that was about to spill out. It would be best to stay away from her for now. Kluele thought this while shaking her head once again. This great hall was originally designed to hold parties, but after more than one thousand five hundred people were crowded inside, it was hard to find where anybody was.

"However, if he's in here, it wouldn't be strange for him to cause a large disturbance."

Even though laughter could be heard everywhere in the room, she didn't hear any loud cheers.

"Could he be secretly scouting someone?"

She turned her line of sight to the direction of Ada's gaze. In one corner of the great hall, a higher-grade student was currently sitting in the judge's section and

talking with the guest Reciter. The two of them weren't smiling, but were instead surrounded by a tense atmosphere that even the watching Kluele could feel. To us lower-grade students, the recital contest is simply an event. However, to the fourth-year students about to graduate, it decided their future path.

"Speaking of which, Kululu also received applause. Has anyone come to scout you?"

Mio asked while looking at her reflection in the glass cup.

"There's no way that could happen. Only Kate-sensei praised me a bit, that's all."

The cheers that she had received were simply an appreciation of her performance, and not a scoring of Recitation skill points. Based on the difficulty of the Recitation, her rank in the recital contest was slightly lower than the average.

Because of this, there were certainly quite a number higher-grade students had performed exceptionally.

In Yellow Recitations, there was a female student who called out numerous canaries and received great cheering

. In Blue Recitations, a student called out an ice cube which was carved into a sculpture of a knight on a horse. As for White Recitations, among the highest grade students, a male student succeeded in calling out a unicorn. She had heard people saying that he would receive the award of being most outstanding.

"By the way, where's Neight?"

Mio, who held a glass in one hand, shook her head.

"We were together just a moment ago. He said he wanted to go outside and get some fresh air. This is a school, so there's no way he could go missing. You don't need to worry about him."

***

A fiendish catalyst— <Egg>.

Since the school wanted to get rid of it, then it shouldn't matter if he took it and used it.

"Well then, how should I do it?"

Vendrell looked down at the gemstone and closed his eyes.

Perhaps he could call out a large creature that he had never succeeded in Reciting before. Not just Second Scale Recitation (Noble Aria), but if it went smoothly, even the highest rank First Scale Recitation (High Noble Aria), the <True Spirit>, wouldn't be impossible to call out.

The three links required for a Recitation— using a specific catalyst, singing a specific <Song of Praise> (Oratorio), and calling out the True Spirit's true name. Only a unique, high-ranked Reciter could satisfy those Recitation conditions. That would be considered a First Scale Recitation (High Noble Aria). If he was able to call that out when least expected, then even that Rainbow Color Reciter would have no means of retaliating.

……Anyhow, I want to call out a powerful, unmatched, fierce creature.

First I'll take this back to my dorm room and confirm just how strong and powerful this catalyst is. Vendrell grabbed the red <Egg> closest to him, and placed the colored catalyst into a backpack he had prepared.

At that moment—

The shell of the <Egg> broke, and the pitch-black of the resources building was driven away by a flash of red light.

"Wha…… Oi, what is this!"

Under light as bright as looking directly into the sun, he was unable to open his eyes. Is this Recitation light?

Hold on a moment, I've never heard of such a thing!

This is different from what I had heard. Why would the light react simply from me holding it?

The red radiance sealed his eyes closed. Just when he wanted to put down the <Egg>, the object in his hand began to expand.

A Recitation had automatically been initiated? How could such a thing be happening? This is impossi—

……Impossible……

Trapped in this panicked situation, Vendrell finally lost consciousness.

Part 6

"This is a Recitation created for your sake. Therefore, Neight, I will only teach it to you."

With a great effort, his mother extended her right hand from the bed. Lowering his gaze, Neight grasped that hand. Because his mother's hand was so thin, simply looking at it made him feel sad.

"Neight…… What do you think a Recitation is?"

Mother asked him, who still averted his gaze. There wasn't a proper answer to that question. That was something that even Neight, who had only just started learning Recitations, knew about. Unsure of what to say, Neight kept his mouth shut. He wasn't able to give a solution, or look straight into her eyes.

But even like this, he was still able to feel the warmth of Mother's hand.

"These things called Recitations are used to call out yourself. That's what I think. A true Reciter is one who gives form to his heart and calls it out. Therefore, it is

exceedingly difficult. Even until the very end, I couldn't do what I just spoke of."

An incantation. The power contained within words. It was like Mother's words right now, a power which made him, who had been averting his gaze, raise his head. His gaze overlapped with his mother's and they made eye contact.

Bedridden, without the strength to even hug her child —

But even so, that mother embraced her son with her gaze.

***

"One hundred and seventy-two…… one hundred and seventy-three……"

Waiting like this, his boiling hot body was unable to cool down. In the multipurpose hall, after being roasted in the heat of a crowd of people, he had wanted to escape to the outside. However, even the outside wasn't

comfortable. The hot wind left behind by the daytime sun still burned in the depths of his lungs.

"One hundred and seventy-four……"

[You seem to have started counting the stars some time ago. Is there a meaning to this?]

It was the familiar voice of Neight's companion. He glanced at the back of Neight, who sat on a bench. There was a grassy field two hundred meters outside the multipurpose hall, and he sat on a bench in the corner of that place.

—He had already been here for about half an hour.

"Yeah. Because by sitting like this, I don't have to think about various things."

He pulled back a knee and placed his hands on it. Immediately, the Night-colored Recited creature flew from the back of the bench onto his lap.

[Various things such as?]

"Just various things, that's all."

Meaninglessly, he simply repeated the lizard's words. In the end, even he couldn't think of something specific among the "various things". The reason why he gazed at the stars really wasn't because of this. Actually, before he realized it, he had already started counting stars.

"……Hey, Arma. Reciting really is difficult."

In the sky, a fragment of a cloud seemed to float in front of the stars and cover them. Slowly moving his gaze away, he focused on the companion on his lap.

[Complaining as always—]

Just when Arma wanted to forcefully criticize him, their gazes met. They continued staring at each other for several seconds, or perhaps it was only a split second. After taking a breath, Arma raised the corners of his mouth and he spoke.

[……It doesn't seem to be.]

"Eh? You can tell?"

Facing Arma, who had successfully sensed what was on his mind, Neight tried to change the subject.

['Reciting is difficult.' If you had truly understood the meaning behind those words and said them, it would be an extraordinary thing. So, what's wrong?]

"Arma, did you also see Kluele-san's performance?"

Maintaining a sitting position on the bench, he brought his legs to his chest and hugged them with both hands. It was the same as her position a few days ago.

"I saw everyone's performances from my group's meeting place, but I assume that Kluele-san's was the best?"

[What are you trying to say?]

"Just—"

When he was waiting for his turn to go on stage, he had seen her Recitation. That was truly—

"She Recited as if she was enjoying it from the bottom of her heart. Is that what you mean?"

The one who spoke those words wasn't Arma. Still sitting on the bench, Neight's head snapped around in the direction of the voice.

Several meters away from him, appeared the figure of a man who wore a coat even though it was summer.

His dry grass colored coat dimly reflected the faint moonlight.

Neight had not forgotten him. It was the Reciter who had helped him the day before yesterday, when the higher-grade student had been picking a fight. Also, yesterday, he heard from Mio that this person was the most famous Reciter in the world—

"It's been two days."

The Rainbow Color Reciter in front of his eyes slowly lifted his right hand and spoke in a conversational voice.

"Ah, that…… Thank you very much for your help that time. I still haven't expressed my gratitude……"

"It's fine, that was nothing. Anyways, may I sit here?"

Neight hastily nodded at the other side of the bench which the man was gesturing at. How could he refuse?

"I wanted to have a little chat with you, so I've been looking for you."

"……With me?"

What's going on? Why would the Rainbow Reciter be looking for me?

"Recently, have you attempted to conduct a Recitation in the laboratory, but failed? The one resembling black smoke, I mean."

"Eh?"

Neight was left speechless at the sudden question. That was certainly what had happened, but why would this person know about such a thing?

"Um…… That's right, my Recitation failed……"

"Ah, I apologize. I wasn't trying to blame you. I'm not even a teacher of this school."

His expression suddenly relaxed.

"Today, I saw your Recitation."

He inquired in a prompting voice while staring at the light of the stars twinkling above his head.

"Was that a Recitation invented by you?"

"What do you mean?"

"I believe that type of Recitation doesn't belong to any of the five colors."

The Rainbow Reciter got straight to the point.

But, how should he answer? Not knowing what to do, Neight lowered his gaze. The Recited creature at his side seemed to say "I'll leave it to you" and curled up on his lap.

"Eh, you could call it that. That Recitation is the original creation of my mother. She called it 'Night Color Recitation'."

"……I see."

Neight felt the illusion that the man stopped breathing for an instant.

"Is that a Recited creature sleeping on your lap?"

By this moment, it would be meaningless to act oblivious. A lizard of this color simply did not exist. Also

, upon closer inspection, his body structure was different from other lizards'. Since the man was the Rainbow Reciter, he should already be used to the sight of this type of creature.

"I think it was about one year ago, when my mother entrusted him to me."

"Entrusted?"

"She said, 'When I am gone, he will instruct you about Night Color Recitations in my place.'"

"……'When I am gone'?"

Suddenly, his voice was mixed with bitterness.

"I don't have real parents. They died in a fire somewhere…… At that time, Mother adopted me from the orphanage. She also started to teach me Recitations from then on…… However, Mother already passed away one year ago."

"……I'm sorry, for asking about something painful."

His words suddenly made Neight realize.

—Eh? Why did I even tell him about that kind of thing ? I hadn't intended to talk so much.

Why? The person beside him felt awfully familiar. Is it because I admire him for being the Rainbow Reciter? No, that wasn't it. It was an indescribable feeling— A kind of feeling similar to sorrow.

"Back to the original topic, you said that Reciting is really difficult?"

Although Neight didn't understand, he felt like the man wanted to avoid the topic that had just come up. Is this the reason why he changed the subject?

However, in order to answer his question, the conversation had to start from there.

"Mother thought that I could change anything I wanted. She was very strict and often scolded me. Initially, I thought the only reason she adopted me was by chance. However, if that's so……"

Neight stopped, and got up from the bench. His memories of when Mother praised him, and when she scolded him, all merged together.

"When I think about it, she was a true mother. When I was sick, she took care of me for three whole days without sleeping…… No, not only that. Although she usually acted cold, actually, she always cared for me."

He unwittingly felt his cheeks starting to turn hot. I can't cry. Even though that was what he thought, he wasn't able to stop the tears which flowed out.

"In the very end, Mother and I made a promise. A long time ago, Mother made a promise to a certain person, to have him be the first to witness Night Color Recitation. I promised to take her place and show that person Night Color Recitation."

Thinking about it now, that might have been Mother's first yet final 'request'.

"A…… promise?"

He forced a smile, and let out the breath he had been holding.

"Until now, even after I came to this school, I've always been thinking about it. In other words, I will try

my best for Mother's sake…… But, after seeing Kluele-san's Recitation today, I feel a little..... How should I say it, I think that I should consider it again."

Neight himself didn't quite understand how to best explain.

"I still don't truly comprehend Mother's promised…… The true Night Color Recitations."

Arma raised his gaze slightly, and Neight felt himself bathed in it.

"So I thought, if that were true, do I need to be so worried? Kluele-san was able to conduct a Recitation happily. I also wish to be able to use my Recitations enjoyably. Even if I end up taking the longer path, as long as I can happily study Recitations with everyone…… Even though I would be letting down the person Mother promised."

"You wouldn't be letting him down."

The Rainbow Reciter got up and stood beside Neight.

"I think, the person who your mother promised would surely understand."

"Is that so?"

The man nodded unhesitatingly at him, as if extremely sure of his answer.

"The day when you master Night Color Recitations, I hope you inform me. I would also like to see it."

"Eh? But I still don't know when that will be."

Neight smiled as if to escape the pressure.

"I'm used to waiting. Sometimes waiting can be a good thing, for example……"

He took out a watch from his pocket and pointed at the school's multipurpose hall.

What's going on? Neight gazed in that direction for one second, two seconds—

The lights suddenly turned on and scorched his eyelids.

"Ah!"

As if he had already predicted this alarmed reaction, a mischievous look showed on his face.

The brilliant radiance of the fluorescent lights at night gave the school an illusionary atmosphere. It wasn't just the multipurpose hall, but also the first-year building, outdoor paths, fountain, and flower garden. Tremia Academy was illuminated with the spectacular lighting.

"This recital contest event is actually a tradition left behind by the predecessor of Tremia Academy, Elfand. Ever since then, only on the nights of the recital contest and the graduation ceremony would the whole school be illuminated like this."

"In other words, Xins-san also used to go to this school ?"

"That's right."

After briefly nodding his head, he wordlessly let his gaze focus on the lights illuminating the school.

As if having received an invitation, Neight also stared at the lit up school buildings.

"It's already been more than ten years since Evhemary and I admired this sight together, but it seems like nothing has changed."

—Eh? Among his words appeared the name of a person who Neight was very familiar with.

"Y-You said Evhemary……?"

"Evhemary Yehlemihas. Is that the same name as your mother?"

With a smile, he mischievously winked at Neight.

Suddenly, it was like something had collapsed, while at the same time, something else gradually appeared.

The person who Mother had promised, and the person standing before his eyes who knew Mother. It couldn't be …… Is it possible that this person is…… The person regarded as the top Reciter, the legendary Rainbow Color Reciter was……

[I see. Then, you're the one who Evhe spoke of……]

Even Arma, who had decided not to get involved and remained silent, fixed his crescent-moon pupils on this man.

"Well, who knows? It might be a completely different person."

Even though Neight spoke those words, he was simply pretending to act oblivious.

Ah……

Deja vu.

I…… Perhaps I understand this man's personality.

I see, this person— In front of other people, the one who doesn't blame anyone and receives the admiration of tens of thousands of people isn't the true him. That kind of naïve expression was only shown for the people who sincerely believed in him to see. But, being a little sarcastic and having a mischievous expression, that was his true personality.

……The same expression as Mother.

The same expression as when Mother smiles at me.

"When you have thoroughly studied Night Color Recitations, I will tell you the answer as a bargain—"

However.

His voice suddenly paused in the middle of speaking those words.

No, it was covered.

A rumble in the ground shook the whole campus.

And then, resounding even more than the rumbling, was a creature's immensely loud roar.

4th Play: The Oath-maker Sings, O World Dyed in Twilight

Part 1

"Just now, that was……?"

An abnormality in the campus. The first to discover it had been a female teacher patrolling around the fourth-year school building.

The shrill noise sounded like both a weeping voice and a wail. Right now, except for the few people including her who were on patrol, the students and teachers should have already proceeded to the multipurpose hall.

Was that someone's voice just now?

The location of the voice wasn't very far or very close, but sounded unusually indistinct. When she turned her head to look at the fourth-year school building behind her, she immediately felt a slight shake through her high-heeled shoes. What could it be? Although it felt like an earthquake, the vibrations weren't regular. The center

of the shaking wasn't very far. For no particular reason, she thought of giants from fairytales, who walked around with heavy footsteps.

At first glance, the fourth-year building didn't seem abnormal. The moment when the female teacher turned to walk in the direction of the path, it happened. Her body felt as heavy as lead. There usually shouldn't be any people in the resources building, which was close beside the fourth-year building. But right now, that whole building was swaying.

"Wha…… What's going on?

In that instant, a deafening explosion noise made her crouch down reflexively. That was a burst of noise more fierce than thunder, as if its sole purpose was to disintegrate her eardrums.

After cautiously opening her eyes— she began to doubt what she was seeing. The roof of the resources building had already vanished without a trace. Instead, something as large as a chimney rose up from inside the building. Moreover, there were five.

What……is this……

The darkness of the night became hazy.

As if jeering at the situation, seven-colored lights illuminated Tremia Academy. Under the shine of those lights, the figure fleeing out of the resources building finally came into complete view.

"—Ah!"

She let out a sharp, blood-curling scream. Her diaphragm was completely contracted, and the hairs all over her body stood on end. This was despite the fact that she had the position of a Recitation instructor. Recited creatures such as Small red Salamandes spirits or unicorns, she had seen many times before. In other words, even if she faced that kind of opponent, she should be confident in herself and remain unmoved.

But even so.

……It's impossible. This isn't something I can deal with alone.

Without the slightest hesitation, she turned and escaped from "that".

The glass cup on the table hit the floor, and shattered after emitting a crisp sound. The chandelier on the ceiling shook violently. The window frame vibrated fiercely, and cracks like spider webs appeared on the glass window.

"W-What? An earthquake?"

Ada, who was leaning against the wall, shouted loudly .

"B-But…… Isn't it somehow strange?"

Rather than a reply, Mio's voice tone sounded more like a screeching soliloquy.

While holding onto the unbalanced Mio's shoulder, Kluele sneaked a glance at a corner of the great hall. Luckily, there weren't many people rushing towards the emergency exit.

"Mio, let's take the chance and escape!"

Kluele whispered covertly into Mio's ear.

"Eh? But…… Nobody has started to evacuate yet!"

"That's why we have to take advantage of the confusion and get out right away!"

This earthquake seemed a little suspicious. Although it was currently still shaking, it had been stopping and starting. Shaking for a while, then becoming calm, then beginning to shake again.

"Hey, Kululu…… What is that……"

Mio suddenly asked, pointing outside the window. The school lights illuminated the world enshrouded in darkness. There should be multi-colored lights, but instead, the scene outside the window was dyed blood-red— A fire?

Without waiting for Mio's consent, Kluele grabbed her hand and rushed towards the emergency exit. Like bubbles, her small misgivings gradually grew. But the one thing she didn't doubt was that something bad had happened in the school.

"Headmaster!"

A female teacher opened the main door of the multipurpose hall, and loudly called for the school's leader. Perhaps it was because she had wildly rushed here, that her clothes were a mess and her breathing was rushed.

"What is it? What happened?"

"All teachers and students, please quickly escape from here!"

It was a sentence that made everyone absolutely horrified. Forcing the voice from her throat, her expression was twisted in fear.

Under normal circumstances, the customary words should be "Please seek refuge." But instead, she had said "Please escape from here." That kind of tone made it seem like something was about to attack.

"A monster is headed this way!"

"Monster?"

"It appears to be a Recited creature, but…… it isn't something we are able to deal with. Call the neighboring regions to provide assistance immediat—"

At that moment, the glass of the lights on the ceiling shattered, and something burst into the hall.

Just like it was mocking the female teacher's mention of asking for assistance.

"E-Earthquake?"

The sudden shaking caused Neight's legs to become unstable. Before he had time to regain his balance, he fell to the ground.

"No, don't you think it's strange?"

The Rainbow Color Reciter had fallen down to one knee due to the vibrations. Looking around, his gaze fell in the direction of the fourth-year school building.

At that instant, the night's darkness which had surrounded that building dispersed. The sky overhead became even more blazing red than sunset. After that,

countless objects on the ground flew towards the blaze. From far away, they looked like bats.

[……This guy is……]

Arma, who stood on Neight's shoulder, shuddered uncontrollably. This Recited creature who possessed night vision seemed to be able to see "that" above them.

[Neight, tell everyone inside the multipurpose hall to seek refuge immediately! If they are all gathered in one place, it will attract their attention!]

"Eh? What do you mean—"

Before the creature could answer, Neight personally saw the frightening entity.

As another vibration shook the ground, "that" stepped on the trees in the direction of the fourth-year building, and approached closer. The faint outlines of several whip-like heads could be seen moving amidst the buildings.

"Is that…… Hydra[5]……?"

The Reciter beside him raised his gaze and muttered. His words were mingled with doubt and bewilderment.

To the Reciter, when speaking of a snake with several heads, the first thing he thought of was a hydra. It should originally be a First Scale Recitation of Blue Recitations.

High Noble Aria

A so-called “Water Snake” should be dark blue.

But “that” which was approaching from several hundred meters away, appeared to have deep crimson scales. Moreover, what should have been nine heads had now become only five, less than the normal number. But from what had entered his field of view, the central head was red. The other four were blue, green, yellow, and white. In other words, it had heads of five colors. In addition, what caused people to become even more speechless was its immense body. If it stretched out its neck, it could exceed twenty meters. Although a hydra was originally considered a large creature, its body length should only be around ten meters. But compared to this one, even dragons would seem like infants.

[Five colors…… Were all of the Recitations conducted simultaneously?]

Through his shoulder, Neight could sense Arma's shuddering.

"—That sort of thing…… Is it even possible?"

Even worldwide, Reciters who were able to conduct multiple colors of Recitations at once could be counted on his fingers, and the most would be two colors at once. On this world, the only one Reciter could possibly Recite all five colors at once, and that was the one with the title of Rainbow Color Reciter, Xins.

"Could it be…… With the <Egg>, someone……"

"<Egg>?"

"It's a fiendish catalyst. All five have all been locked inside the resources building."

The hydra's green head rose up like a sickle. Facing upwards, it opened its mouth and maintained that position without moving. Although they didn't know what it wanted to do, they should take the opportunity when it stopped moving and warn everyone inside the hall to take refuge. But just when Neight decided to take action, the Reciter beside him grabbed his arm.

"Wait a moment. You will be discovered if you move wildly!"

The green head spat out something at the sky. Four or five of the things in the sky spread their wings and flew in Neight's direction. They looked like small birds, but weren't. As they approached, their figure became more and more clear. They had three heads……

Chimera![6]

Just when he shouted, he was pushed down by the Rainbow Reciter. The beast's claws swiped past the spot he had been standing a second ago. Having suddenly missed its target, the chimera's claws sank deeply into the ground.

A beast with the three heads of a lion, goat, and dragon.

The beast changed targets from the distant Neight to the Reciter wearing a coat.

"Xins-san!"

Had he already predicted it? Xins had moved a long time ago. The chimera pounced on empty space when it

landed, and the Reciter took out a yellow object from inside his coat. The chimera kicked the ground, but he didn't run away. The gold coin between his fingers emitted a dazzling golden-yellow light.

——[Yellow Song Surisuz]——

On the diagonal between him and the chimera, flowing at a fast speed from the yellow light, rose a sphere giving off a blue-white flash. Floating in the empty space, with a circumference like it could be encircled by both arms, the sphere began to emit beams of light at the chimera. The light beams were extremely thin, like string that could be snapped at a touch.

As the light wrapped around the chimera's claws, several other chimera with a body weight heavier than Neight let out a shrill scream. Their whole body shuddered, trembled, and finally stopped moving.

It was a Yellow Recitation's Second Scale Noble Aria Recitation, Small yellow Will-o'-wisp spirit?

"I've never heard of a hydra calling out chimeras…… That hydra probably swallowed the <Egg> after it was born."

The Rainbow Reciter's expression had already lost its former composure.

"……Go!"

"Eh?"

After realizing that Neight didn't understand his intentions, he quickly explained.

"The task of guiding the other students is up to you. The headmaster has probably already realized, but it's better to be safe."

"W-What about Xins-san?"

Gazing above the head of the silent Reciter, Neight understood his reasons. Numerous bat-like creatures flew in the sky, and were instinctively circling above their heads. Above them, they couldn't all be……

"At most, I can act as bait."

At first, his tone of voice sounded like he was joking. But right now, there were still many of the creatures left.

"Everyone, don't panic! Starting with the students closest to the emergency exit, head for shelter in the first-year building!"

The sounds of students screaming and fallen glass being stepped on echoed throughout the great hall.

"Homeroom teachers of first-year students, make sure the way forward is clear. Second-year and third-year homeroom teachers, take care of anything that has entered the school building. Anyone else, take care of the creatures outside! But pursuing them is forbidden!"

Had the headmaster's orders really been heard by all of the teachers? The hall filled with screams caused new fear, and the fear stirred up even more chaos.

"—Mio, are you okay?"

A sharp pain caused her mind to turn blank, and Kluele couldn't help but wince.

"I'm……fine. Kululu…… Sorry…… I'm sorry…… I……"

Mio usually looked up to Kluele, but now the situation was completely reversed. With her hands on the floor to support herself, Kluele raised her head and looked around. Beside her, Mio was sobbing.

“Kluele, are you okay?”

Grabbing Kluele’s hand, Serges came closer. Kluele used the arm she was able to move and pushed her away .

“……I’m fine. You go first, I’ll be right there.”

After that, she turned her gaze back to the figure of her crying friend.

“Mio, you should also go first.”

“No! No matter what you say, I will definitely go together with Kululu!”

Really, how stubborn! Although she wanted to say it out loud and tease her, with all the strength gone from her body, it was impossible. Pressing down on her left shoulder, Kluele leaned against the wall and slowly

stood up from her sitting position on the floor. Although it was a simple action, it caused her breathing to become faster.

"Don't move! If you move, the blood won't stop!"

"……If I keep sitting here, I won't be able to escape if the beast comes."

The left shoulder part of her dress had been dyed a deep red. Turning her head away, she once again pressed her right hand tightly to her left shoulder. The way of stopping bleeding that she had learned in first aid class, she hadn't expected to put it to use one day.

Glancing at the blood sticking to the palm of her right hand, Kluele curved the corner of her mouth.

"Leave this to me. Go!"

The Rainbow Color Reciter moved the will-o'-wisp behind his back while pointing at the hall.

"B-But—"

It was absurd. There was no way that one person alone could deal with so many opponents.

[Neight, let's go.]

Neight's words were interrupted.

"……Arma?"

The creature standing on his shoulder acted normal…… No, he spoke in a tone of voice slightly colder than usual.

[First, we have to ensure the safety of the people inside the hall. There are already many chimeras who have headed off in that direction. In the worst case, there are already people who have been injured.]

Arma never rushed. He was able to correctly analyze a situation better than anyone else, and was able to evaluate the priority of which action to take. Neight had already felt like this one or two times before.

……This Night creature is really cool-headed, or at least calmer than I am.

"Xins-san."

Neight didn't regard him as a Rainbow Reciter, but instead as the person who made the promise with Mother. Neight directly faced the person who had kept his side of the promise.

"I will work hard to study Night Color Recitations. Therefore— Someday, you have to see it!"

Without even waiting for a reply, Neight dashed away without looking back.

Very well, I promise. Because that is the agreement between her and myself.

He watched the back of the still-learning Reciter, who rushed towards the hall.

On the face of the Rainbow Reciter was an ordinary, calm expression.

"Alright. For the sake of this, I have to survive. I'm counting on you to work hard!"

The lightning spirit didn't make a noise, but emitted a stronger light in reply.

Part 2

The chimera lay on the floor, unable to move a single step.

This chimera had suddenly broken through the ceiling and landed in front of the emergency exit, blocking the passageway. Next, facing the nearest target —Mio, the chimera advanced— But because Kluele pushed her aside instinctively, Mio wasn't injured. However, contrarily, Kluele's left shoulder received the attack.

Perhaps it wounded an artery. The dress's left shoulder was dyed deep red, and the flow of blood still hadn't stopped.

"Kluele, are you okay?"

Kate, a teacher who had originally been leading the students to take refuge, now ran over to them.

"What about you? ……Please go back and stay with everyone else. I need to stay here and rest for a while."

Even simply opening her mouth caused extreme pain, but she still let out the last of the air from her lungs and with great effort, forced out a voice from her throat.

"I'm your homeroom teacher, so I can't abandon you, no matter what."

The female teacher looked down and shook her head.

"But…… There are more than thirty students in the school building who sensei is in charge of!"

She really didn't want to act this forceful, but the teacher shouldn't accompany her, who couldn't move. She had more important things to do.

Had the electric cables been cut off? The chandelier above her head flickered on and off. If there were no lights, then heading to the first-year building would not be easy. Therefore, it was necessary to help other students get to refuge as early as possible. Even if she didn't want to, the teacher should understand that point.

After a little while, an abandoning look appeared in Kate's eyes.

"……After I confirm that everyone else in the class has safely taken refuge, I will come back. Until then, I will leave it to you, Mio."

After confirming that the girl had nodded, Kate hurried away.

Of the noisy sounds coming from outside, it was unclear which were people yelling and which were the monster's roaring. Outside the window was the scene of burning trees. Only a few minutes after experiencing the sudden earthquake, in the time it took to count a few hundred seconds, their surroundings had become this miserable.

"Why…… Why would something like this happen……"

Into the cloth bound around Kluele's arm as a bandage , the girl sobbed.

"Mio, don't cry. If you want to cry, wait until a happy time to cry tears of joy."

"……I'm not crying!"

Closing her mouth, the girl tied the bandage into a tight knot.

"Thank you. Like this, I just need to rest a bit and I'll be fine."

Kluele felt like vomiting from loss of blood. She closed her eyes and took slow, regular breaths.

The chandelier made a sharp creaking noise…… That's bad. The power outage now would only cause the uproar outside to become more serious.

Suddenly—

"Kluele-san! Mio-san! Are you there?"

The sound of a familiar voice, along with someone stepping on broken glass, could be heard.

"……Neight-kun?"

As if responding to Mio's mutter, the front door of the hall swung open, and a young boy wearing a robe appeared. After seeing that figure, a large weight was lifted from her heart.

……I'm glad. Although everyone else was outside, they appeared to be safe and sound.

"Neight-kun, you have to quickly go take shelter in the school building!"

"But, I heard from Ada-san that you two are still here …… Kluele-san, you're injured!"

"Um, ah, this isn't much."

She didn't like having people worry about her. Before Neight could approach, just when she wanted to stand up with the support of the wall—

At that moment, the lights of the hall's chandelier went out.

"Eh……"

Not knowing the circumstances inside the hall, the boy gasped in surprise. Before Kluele could open her mouth, Mio, who stood within the darkness, shouted loudly.

"Neight-kun, wait. This place is covered in broken glass. If you walk around aimlessly, you'll get hurt! Until the lights come back on, stay still for now."

"I-I understand."

A cold, frozen silence engulfed the hall.

Looking out the window, the outside was also eerily quiet. It was like the shouts and screams until now hadn't been real. Had something happened? Or was it because nothing had happened, that it was this quiet? Neither possibility could be ruled out.

It was just like a desolate and lifeless earth.

……Such a depressing imagination, isn't it?

Kluele gritted her teeth and continued to put pressure on her shoulder.

Suddenly, like the chiming of a clock, the sound of breaking glass shook her eardrums. Not once. Two times, three times. The sounds gradually grew louder and closer together.

"Neight-kun, you're not allowed to move around!"

After a second of silence.

"Eh…… I didn't move……"

Hearing the contradictory reply, before she could feel dumbfounded, Mio's whole body was enveloped in fear.

Other than us, there was still something else inside this building?

Faintly, she felt a hot breath on her skin.

"Mio, duck!"

The chandelier lit up. Before Mio could take a breath, in the dark, Kluele grabbed Mio's dress and pulled her downwards. Something flew past above her head. The flickering light shone upon a three-headed monster.

—Chimera. To have appeared at such an unexpected time!

Kluele clenched her teeth. It was bad. Among the three of us, there wasn't anybody able to use a Recitation that could fight off this monster.

Slowly, the chimera moved closer.

"Kluele-san!"

Neight wanted to run over, but Kluele stopped him. It was absurd. This kind of opponent wasn't something that a student who had just entered high school could deal with.

"Just hurry and run away! Mio, you too!"

"No…… I will stay together with Kululu until the very end…… Because I was the one who injured you……"

"Idiot! Stop being stubborn at this kind of time!"

The details of Neight's Night Color Recitations weren't clear. Mio's Green Recitations included few creatures that were able to attack. Actually, her Red Recitations were probably the best to deal with it.

I have to at least call out a flame…… No, even if I was able to call out a flame, its power wouldn't be enough to drive away this creature. And even more important was the catalyst—

Kluele looked around, searching for something able to be used as a catalyst. Suddenly, her gaze stopped on the body of the Recited creature on Neight's shoulder. That Night creature was silently looking back at her.

No, more precisely, at my left shoulder?

Ah……

I've got it! An available catalyst, a catalyst able to be used for Red Recitations, there was only this.

"Neight, back away!"

With difficulty, Kluele stretched her right hand towards the table. She grabbed a glass cup that hadn't been smashed on the ground by the vibrations and threw it at the chimera.

Although it hadn't expected that move, the monster swept its tail and flung the glass cup to one side. It glanced at the spilled liquid on the floor, and exposed its mud-colored teeth in a mocking manner.

The three-headed animal kicked off the floor.

There was no time to untie it. Kluele used her mouth to bite down on the bandage around her left shoulder—and ripped open that layer of bandages.

Like a red waterfall bursting free of a dam, red blood splashed onto the back of her hand.

'Do you want to withdraw into your shell once more, or struggle to escape?'

Even without you saying it, I know!

—Please, let it succeed……

The blood boiled. The blood sticking onto her right hand emitted a radiance, and gradually evaporated.

Next, a ball of flame arose from her right hand. Still lying on the floor, Kluele threw it with all of her strength.

The flame that she had used all the strength in her body to throw approached the monster. At that moment, it stopped its footsteps. Although the flame swept past the tip of its nose, the place it landed wasn't on the creature's body, but rather beside its foot. It looked disdainfully at the flame that had fallen to the ground, and narrowed its eyes.

"……Do you think you've won?"

Although Kluele looked pale from loss of blood, she curled up the corners of her mouth.

"It's my win. Come again next time!"

Because she had originally been aiming for under its foot, missing its body was supposed to happen. The glass cup filled with alcohol that she had thrown in the beginning, and that the creature had swatted it aside, was all part of Kluele's plan. Because from the start, she had planned to throw the flame at the alcohol spilled on the carpet.

In that instant, before the monster had time to sense the change under its feet, the alcohol caught fire.

In short, under its feet was an ocean of fire. Its whole body engulfed in flames, the chimera let out a scream. Struggling painfully to spread its flame-covered wings, it started to fly towards the ceiling.

……Well, it seems that it's escaped.

As if her strength had been sucked dry, Kluele collapsed to the ground.

"Kluele-san!"

While calling out her name, Neight hurriedly headed for her side. The pure white dress she wore was stained red by blood, and her complexion looked even paler in comparison.

"……I'm sorry, let me rest for a bit."

The girl's body shivered. The cause was both the chill from losing a lot of blood, as well as the pain from being scratched by the creature's claws.

"I'm sorry…… I'm unable to do anything…… And you always end up helping me."

Neight was unable to look straight at Kluele's face, and stared down at his own feet. He resented how he could only speak those words but was unable to handle the responsibility.

He couldn't do anything, could only have other people to protect him.

By his mother Evhemary, saved by the Rainbow Color Reciter, and now he even received this girl's protection.

But— if it's like this, then for what purpose did I make that promise?

'This is a Recitation created for your sake. Therefore, Neight, I will teach this only to you.'

The promise he made with Mother.

'The day when you master Night Color Recitations, I hope you inform me. I would also like to see it.'

The promise he made with the Rainbow Reciter.

'I will follow your example and try my best.'

The promise he made with the girl in front of his eyes.

For what purpose do those promises exist?

The promised Night Color Recitation, for what purpose does it exist?

All of those oaths mixed together, and like a large whirlpool, dashed against the water's surface of his heart and memories.

Among those, only one sentence, the one most simple sentence, remained completely.

'Neight…… What is a Recitation?'

The most basic, but a problem without a solution, one that nobody knew the true answer to.

Mother, this might not be the answer that you thought of, but……

“Kluele-san…… You said to me today, if I were to become afraid of failure.”

Biting hard on his lip, he was just able to suppress the emotions emerging from the depths of his heart.

But, even so. I’ve already found the answer.

Everyone knows the feeling of being afraid, everyone knows the feeling of being in pain— That’s why, I also want to do something.

Not just for the promise I made with Mother, but for everyone’s sake.

"……Neight?"

She was still pale and weak, but even so, she gazed at him.

"But, I don't want to fail anymore."

Like he wanted to cut off his uneasiness, Neight continued.

"Just one thing, I…… Please allow me to challenge myself."

"That's—"

Before Mio could finish speaking—

[Night Color Recitations, do you intend to challenge it ?]

The Night colored creature on Neight's shoulder that had been silent until now, opened its mouth seriously.

Rather than a question, that tone of voice sounded more like a confirmation. Therefore, Neight nodded his head without hesitating.

It was a Recitation that his mother had taught him. But , there was a high wall that he had to climb over—

[The problem is the catalyst.]

It was like he had thought. Had this Recited creature sensed what was on his mind?

“Neight-kun, what do you mean by that?”

“……I don’t know what the catalyst necessary for conducting a Night Color Recitation is.”

Like he was beseeching her, Neight turned to face Mio with an uneasy expression.

“My mother let me see the catalyst only once…… But as for how to prepare it, I……”

[Night-colored flame.]

The creature on the boy’s shoulder continued to speak.

[There is only one true essence among Night Color Recitations. That specific catalyst, is a Night-colored flame.]

Night-colored flame— The girl wearing a dress pondered those words with an amazed expression. Of course she would think about that problem. Flames had always been red. What had to be done to change it into the deep hue he saw at that time?

[I have certainly seen it also. But, I didn't ask how it had been created.]

That's right. The final Recitation that Mother had taught, it did not require a catalyst.

She had conducted it with her bare hands, the last thing Mother had taught him— Twilight-Colored Song.

Twilight. When the sun sets. That is, announcing the beginning of night, the bell of time.

In the limited Night Color Recitations, the very first song Mother had recited.

"If I don't know it……"

Neight bit his lip. If there was no catalyst, it was impossible for him to complete a Recitation with his own power.

"Neight. With that Recitation, what can you do?"

"……I don't know."

Face to face with Kluele, who had been continuously staring at him, Neight unhesitatingly spoke the truth.

—But, I want to believe.

The last Recitation that Mother taught me. A Recitation for the sake of fulfilling my promise with the Rainbow Reciter.

Those two are surely the same song.

"Th-That……"

"……It doesn't matter, you don't have to finish speaking— I understand what you mean."

Still smiling, the girl slowly continued to speak.

"That must be a very important song to you."

Even though he hadn't said it out loud, the girl before him already completely accepted it.

[Neight, I really admire your resolve. But in reality, without a catalyst, you cannot expect any results.]

"Night-colored flame……huh. Mio, do you know anything—"

Kluele turned around to ask the silent girl.

For a few seconds, Mio wordlessly closed her eyes—

"Night-colored flame…… Ah…… Aaah……"

Suddenly, her voice echoed throughout the hall.

"I got it! I have a clue about the Night-colored flame!"

……She has a clue?

[Really?]

"Yeah, it's probably not wrong. But, some things are required to create it. I'll go get it— Ah……"

Mio hesitated. She threw an anxious look at her friend.

"Mio, go ahead."

She slowly shook her head.

"……Kululu?"

"I'm fine. And as for Neight……"

Still resting on the floor, the girl looked at him with moist eyes.

"—I won't do anything unreasonable, I promise."

No words were needed. Neight nodded his head once in assent.

"Mio-san, after you're ready, please come to the schoolyard. I will go first."

"I understand. I'll be right there. ……Kululu, please, you have to stay safe!"

"Don't say such ominous words. I won't die."

Wiping away her hesitation, the girl wearing the pearl-colored dress headed towards the emergency exit passageway. Please go quickly as well— Without a reason, Kluele's gaze followed Neight's back as he headed towards the front gate of the hall.

……This is fine, right?

Kluele closed her eyes and let out a breath. Actually, she didn't even have the strength to breathe. The feeling of wanting to vomit, her headache, and even the pain in her right shoulder couldn't be felt. Her whole body was engulfed by an intense sleepiness. She hadn't expected to hang on for so long.

……Really, I didn't expect my willpower to be so strong.

Without making any noise, the girl fell unconscious.

Part 3

"Headmaster, the students have already taken refuge in the first-year building!"

"I understand! Leave a few people in that building, and everyone else should come here!"

At the same time, the screaming sound that could nearly rupture eardrums rushed into his ears. Turning around to look, the wings of the two wyverns that he had called out had been bitten into tatters.

…….How could there be such a monster!

Zea Lordfill wiped away the beads of sweat which had appeared on his forehead. It wasn't caused by the thick smoke rising from his surroundings or by the heat, but rather by the overwhelming pressure emitted by the monster before his eyes that made his body scream.

Although the hydra moved rather slowly, it was still gradually approaching. The Green First Scale Recitation's wyverns were simply incapable of withstanding it. Blocking its advances was the limit. Furthermore, if they stopped attacking for even a little, the five heads would summon chimeras one after the other.

High Noble Aria

Even having reinforcements arriving tomorrow morning was an optimistic estimate. Could they last until then? This wasn't an outcome to look forward to.

"Not just quality…… Even quantity, our side has a disadvantage……"

Glancing overhead, he cursed the mental state that was like vomiting blood.

The number of chimeras called out by the large snake wasn't ordinary. Because they spread out in the sky and landed everywhere around the school, our fighting forces have been scattered. Because he hadn't made an appearance, Xins should also be holding back the chimera attacks.

If there was one more powerful Reciter…… If there was a technique-user who could rival the Rainbow Reciter……

But, he immediately shook off the thought that had risen to his mind like a blister.

Ugh, I've become weak. No, I can't think about such dreams. I can't let my concentration be disrupted.

—The school has to be protected by the headmaster.

***

"Enne, go check if there are any students who haven't escaped yet. We will be doing something here."

The tall teacher with the sleeve of his scarlet robe pulled up to his elbow gave this instruction to the female teacher wearing a white robe.

"But compared to a moment ago, the number of chimeras here is even more……"

"If it's only for a while, we can still withstand it. The safety of students has the priority."

"But……"

Just when the female teacher wanted to argue back, someone put a hand on her shoulder.

"—It's already been more than ten years since Elfand, hasn't it?"

A teacher wearing a water-colored robe pushed up the glasses on the bridge of his nose while showing a bitter smile.

"We've all known each other for so long. You should have a little confidence in your students, all right?"

That arrogant tone of voice made her expression relax slightly for a split second. This egghead was the same as when she first met him, and hadn't changed at all.

—But that's true. So many years have passed already, haven't they? We've been together for such a long time.

If so, at this time…… No, because it's this time, I should believe them.

"……Be careful."

She smashed the flask in her hand onto the ground. The glass shattered after making a sharp noise, and white smoke to be used as a catalyst enveloped her surroundings.

——[White Song Arzus]——

From among a thick, fog-like mist, three winged white horses appeared after letting out a neighing sound that

echoed throughout the school. It was White's Second Scale Noble Aria Recitation, Pegasus. It was the Recitation she had dreamed of ever since she was a student.

She got onto one of them, and issued an order to the two people behind her.

"Zessel, Mirror! You two support them, I'll be right back!"

***

Let's ring the bell of the Color of Night
"—Isa Yer she riena xeoi pel"

Let's ring the bell of twilight (beginning)
[—sheon lef dimi-l-cori riec-c-wavir]

A boy wearing a deep blue robe sang the <Song of Praise Oratorio>.

He stood in the center of the school's central campus.

It was a strange scene. Except for the center circle—Other than the diameter of only several meters, the surrounding one hundred meters in all directions was engulfed in flame. Inside that was only one person, the boy with his eyes closed to the dazzling scene.

The flame was needed to be used as a catalyst. This inexperienced Reciter could only use the catalyst to compensate for his skill. Therefore, he needed a large amount of flames.

Gradually, the heat could be felt even in the central space, the red tendrils of flame approaching closer. There was nowhere to escape to. At this rate, it wouldn't be long before he would undoubtedly be engulfed by the sea of flames.

Even so—

The boy didn't have a distressed expression. It wasn't that he couldn't feel the heat. His small cheeks were covered with beads of sweat, and the tips of his wet hair shone with the same color drops. He was frightened at surrounding himself with flames. But, he certainly felt an emotion which exceeded that feeling.

I love (desire) only you
"miqvy elmei nehhe virgia-c-fifsia"
I love (desire) you
—elma Ies neckt evoia twispeli kei

For this reason, do you quietly cry alone?
"zette ovan Yer be zarabearc solituqs"
For this reason, no matter where you cry, I will go to welcome you before anyone else
—zette Yer cana arcasha Loo ifex LoR zarabearc sm ferme

Not existing anywhere, Until evening (the small you)
"Lears neckt ele ravience Shadir"
You are here, Until the beautiful one (person with large desires)
—Lom giris leya mihhya lef hid, ravience Stalwari

Standing alone without anybody knowing, was the dusk-colored song user. The <Song of Praise (Oratorio)> of twilight which nobody had heard before.

Then, in the place of the one who should originally be here, I shall at least watch over this small, nighttime traveler.

[……Evhemary. A lonely little girl. My only acknowledged Reciter.]

Directly above the school, even higher in the sky than the group of chimera. Arma lifted the tip of his nose up towards the Recital Channel Gate that was opening slowly but surely.

The girl had once been ridiculed by the people at her side, but with the passing of time—

[As I thought, Neight is your son.]

As if washing away the disgrace in his mother's place, the son sang the song that his mother had left behind. Looking at that figure, even Arma didn't notice his own expression becoming gentle.

After that, all he needed to do was wait.

Wait for the moment when the flames enveloping the world are dyed in the color of night.

He wasn't standing on the boy's shoulder, but rather on the situation descending to the ground. Arma gazed up steadily at that boy.

***

Even so, it was still tiresome……

Xins used the sleeve of his coat to wipe away the sweat flowing into his eyes. The will-o'-wisp by his side was already the third one. Even though it was a Recited creature of the second scale, its power wasn't unlimited. After being used up to a certain degree, it would disappear without a warning.

He was also like that. Fatigue wore down his attention, and the success rate of his Recitations was inevitably dropping.

Right now, the headmaster seemed to be restraining the hydra. But to that monster, even a wyvern wouldn't be a good opponent. Except for the one head dealing with the situation here, the remaining four heads continued to spit out chimeras.

Although he wanted to go and assist the headmaster, simply knocking down the chimera took all of his

strength. And while he was doing that, the hydra would call out even more chimera. It was a vicious circle. He was just barely able to fight against them for now, but how long could this balance last?

He took out a small flask from inside his coat. Ripples wavered and rose to the yellow water's surface. Although it was a catalyst usually used only in emergencies, its amount was decreasing.

"……It's become an astonishing recital contest."

Without even a bitter smile, Xins pulled open the lid of the flask.

The building two hundred meters away from the first-year school building was, in other words, the second year school building. Inside it should be the material used to create Night-colored flames.

Holding her breath, Mio walked down the lane leading to the building. It wasn't to escape the gaze of others, but so that she wouldn't be spotted by the monsters circling overhead.

The lights of the school occasionally illuminated the figures of the chimeras. The teachers should have already taken care of them, but the number of chimeras hadn't changed much from the first time she had seen them. It was merely the kind of change like turning from a hundred to ninety.

……It would be bad if I were to be seen this time.

Green Recitation isn't suited for battle. There was nothing in her repertoire to drive away the three-headed beasts, let alone defeat them. At any rate, she could only pray to not be discovered.

Appearing as if she was connected to the shadow of the school building, after she left the first-year building, she moved forward as if treading on the shadows of plants.

"This here is…… The final obstacle……"

She spoke out loud to remind herself. In front of her was the straight path from the first-year building to the second-year building. There were no places to hide, nor any trees or grass. This section of the asphalt path was about fifty meters long.

How fast is my running time?

The painful heartbeats in her chest became stronger. Although there were nearly a hundred monsters overhead, sprinting this distance shouldn't take more than ten seconds. I definitely won't be noticed. I shouldn't be noticed. Even if I happen to be noticed, I can escape as long as I enter the building. Anyhow, I can't just stay here and let time pass. I can't let Kluele be alone.

—She ran.

Not looking overhead or behind her, she stared fixedly in front of her.

The nighttime road nearly caused her to trip. It was clearly a short distance, but her head hurt from lack of oxygen. As she seized the crucial moment, that heavy pressure seemed like it would crush her.

However. The girl ran the whole distance.

Just when her hand touched the building, she collapsed exhaustedly.

"I still……haven't done anything yet…… I have to find that and deliver it to Neight-kun……"

Staggering, Mio began advancing towards the inside of the second-year school building.

Her destination was the chemical preparation room.

At the same time.

——[Red Song Keinez]——

A teacher wearing a scarlet robe called out a crimson lotus flame. The two chimera, approaching the building where the students were taking refuge, were completely surrounded by the deep crimson whirlpool. Backfire— A moment before the whirlpool of fire was about to engulf the teacher himself……

——[Blue Song Ruguz]——

In front of the man wearing the scarlet robe appeared a thin film of water. Although it looked like a thin wall that would be penetrated at a touch, it blocked the raging blaze.

"Zessel, don't be too excessive."

"Hm? Did I make eye contact? Did I ask for your protection?"

Zessel gave a low laugh at the colleague standing beside him.

"Either way, it can't be helped if I don't get burned a little."

"……You're making an unusual argument."

While constantly moving his line of sight, Mirror returned a forced laugh.

"How many have you stopped?"

"Five. It's rather annoying that they don't attack at the same time."

……Damn, are there only two imitation rubies left? While being alert for anything overhead, Zessel confirmed the number of catalysts remaining in his breast pocket. The attack was too sudden, and he was in a pained situation with nearly no equipment.

Although he wanted to finish it quickly with something of the First or Second scale, he was worried that an attack could come from overhead at any moment, making him unable to focus his attention. Also, the Prime Aria creatures he could call out with a Third Scale Recitation were equally matched against the chimera. Therefore, bit by bit, he had retreated to just in front of the school building.

"…..Enne, why so slow?"

"I had to rescue some students, so I took some time."

She immediately said the answer she had prepared beforehand. She understood the feelings of Mirror, who muttered in a low voice. Because, she was thinking the same thing.

Even so, right now, he had no choice but to believe it.

"I'm going to end it with a Second scale Recitation. Until then, please cover me."

Zessel gripped a ruby in his right hand, and before his companion could reply, he had already closed his eyes. Beside him, only the fluttering sound of Mirror's deep blue robe reached his eardrums.

At that instant, the bushes that were only a few meters away from him rustled. In the illumination of the embers, appeared a shadow with three heads.

"Zessel!"

Mirror uttered a shout that was close to a shriek.

……So it was hiding there!

Without even the time to be speechless, he downgraded his Recitation from the Second scale to the Fourth scale. If it were a flame, he could immediately—No, that's no good!

Zessel felt regretful. The chimera was too close. In the short distance, even Mirror wouldn't have time to make a film of water. If he were to use a flame, he would undoubtedly also be caught up in the whirlpool of flames

. Although he thought up a few methods to withstand the attack, none of them were sufficient to reverse the situation. What could he do?

"Zessel! What are you doing?!"

The monster didn't miss that instant of hesitation. By the time he came to his senses, the beast's teeth were already approaching before his eyes.

"Oh no—"

He was unable to move his body or close his eyes. He felt prepared for those teeth to impale his body.

At that instant—

——[*Return Nussis*] ——

Without warning, a quiet, solemn voice resounded.

Before Zessel had understood the word 'return'—

The chimera was dragged into its shadow.

At that moment, all that remained was a *plunk* sound, like a rock being thrown into the water's surface.

"Wha-!"

How could such a thing have happened? Looking around, he couldn't feel the presence of any person or thing.

"Are you alright?!"

Mirror ran over. Because of what had just happened, Zessel was unable to make a sound. The fact that a Recited creature was sent back means, that was also a Recitation just now? But—

"What happened just now……"

Zessel forced a voice out of his throat. Mirror was also standing still with a dumbfounded expression. On his face seemed to be written, 'If you who was standing beside me doesn't know, then how am I supposed to know?'

Commonly referred to as 'Reverse Song', it was a technique to send back a creature that had been called out. But a type of Reverse Song where it had been pulled into its shadow? Even he himself, who had the position of a Recitation teacher, couldn't tell what color the

Recitation had been. Could it be a Recitation that he had never even heard of, let alone see for the first time?

“Mirror, did you hear it?”

“Hear what?”

He questioned back. Could it be that it was just a hallucination?

—Sheesh, you’re even a teacher, so pull yourself together—

Immediately after the chimera had been sent back, the wind that had blown past his ear seemed to have carried that sound from somewhere. It was a voice he remembered hearing a long, long time ago.

***

[Bird without feathers. Chick who broke out of its shell. You are—]

From some faraway place, sounded an unclear voice like an echo. Whether it was male or female couldn't be distinguished. A sound that didn't belong to this world, with a mysterious tone.

[Kluele.]

Finally, she realized that the voice was speaking to her.

It was a word she remembered hearing before. That's right, it's my name.

[Call out to me. Give me a name.]

Who are you?

[I am you. Your wings. Come, wake up.]

I don't really understand. ……Even though I don't know who you are, I'm sorry. I'm already very tired.

[Even so, you must fly. Let's go together. Under the small, small night.]

Night. That word caused something to respond somewhere in her heart. The threads of her

consciousness that should have been severed gradually connected back together. Night……night……night color …… Something tightened in her chest.

Why? Even though she was already exhausted, she felt the feeling that she must move. She felt the feeling that she must go.

But, she didn't know for what. She didn't know for whom.

'Night', who is it talking about? Hey, tell me.

[Come, wake up.]

The voice didn't answer. Wake up. Those words disappeared, and the world became quiet once again.

***

"Take these children into that building!"

The number of students who had been burned by the leaping flames and students who had frantically escaped

when the beasts attacked, was more than expected. The Pegasus could only carry two students at a time to the school building. Although she had brought along three at first, she needed more than twice that number.

Under the scorching heat of the flames, she wiped away sweat from her forehead.

—There probably aren't any more people there.

"Is anyone still there? If so, answer me!"

The surrounding flames made crackling noises, and prevented voices from being transmitted very far. She passed the second-year building, the third-year building, and arrived at the four-way intersection near the schoolyard. The bushes shook with a rustling sound, and she reflexively turned around.

"……Is someone over there?"

It could be a student who was injured and unable to move, and couldn't cry for help even if he wanted to. This premonition passed through her mind.

"Enne, get away from there!"

She heard someone's voice. At that moment, she didn't realize that those words were directed at her. Ignoring the warning, she took a step forward—

……Eh……

She made eye contact with six lines of sight within the bush. It couldn't be!

Before she had time to feel afraid, someone rushed directly in front of her. A dry grass colored coat filled her view.

Roaring, the chimera flew towards them. The Reciter used his left hand to block its claws. Even from her position, Enne could hear the terrible sound of claws ripping through flesh.

[*Return* *Nussis*]

Using his right hand to touch the beast's body, the man muttered. After emitting a green Recitation light, the figure of the beast gradually became hazy. After confirming that it had completely disappeared, the man turned around while breathing out a deep sigh.

"Although you're always calm, if you become engrossed in one thing, you won't be able to see something else that's unexpected. You haven't changed since the times back in Elfand, Enne."

"X-Xins?"

The person before her eyes was a classmate from Elfand.

"Long time no see. Because we've both been busy with the recital contest, I haven't had time to come say hi. What about Zessel and Mirror? They should also be teachers here, right?"

While surveying his surroundings, he mentioned the names of the people who had been with her until a moment ago.

"They should be over by the first-year building."

Before she finished speaking, Enne realized that the man in front of her was holding his left arm protectively.

"Xins, you can't possibly be……"

"—Is it that bad?"

He averted his gaze. Sure enough…… He had a broken bone.

Using his physical body to block the chimera's claws wasn't simply bad, but reckless. But there wasn't anything else he could have done to save her. In a situation where his friend and enemy were close to each other, using a Recitation would cause both sides to get hurt. In order to protect her, he could only a technique that involved touching the enemy directly, which was using a Reverse Song to send it away.

"……I'm sorry. I…… What can I say?"

Considering in terms of power, compared to her, one of the Rainbow Reciter's arms was clearly more power.

"You don't need to feel sorry. It could have been a student collapsed there. But I've already searched this area, so I knew that couldn't possibly have been a student."

While wrapping his left hand in his coat, her classmate kept an eye on their surroundings.

"However, it was bad timing. Just when it had started to move……"

In a position to surround the two of them, the beasts began to descend simultaneously.

No. It wasn't bad timing. They had definitely hovering in the sky all along, waiting for an opportunity. Waiting for a moment when this man who was a threat to them got injured.

Looking behind her, she saw that there were more than ten chimeras. If they attacked all at once, even the Rainbow Reciter would have a hard time dealing with them. The only remaining catalyst she had left was an opal ring she wore on her finger.

Failure is not allowed— In this case, she should call out a Pegasus. The failure rate for two of them was greater than for one.

……I'm fine either way. But she had to get him out of here. Not just the chimera, but in order to defeat the hydra who was controlling everything behind the scenes, only this man had a chance of succeeding.

"Xins…… I will be calling out a Pegasus, so please get on right after it's out."

In a low voice, she instructed him, who stood behind her.

After hearing her words, his back shook.

"Enne— You haven't changed."

His voice sent shivers up Enne's spine. It wasn't a low, overpowering sound. Instead, it was the reverse, a calm tone of voice.

However, why did his calmness make her feel afraid?

"Because it was something difficult for you to say, you talked more quickly…… I won't escape by myself."

This time, his words left Enne speechless.

As she had expected. She had already somewhat sensed it back in Elfand. I really hate that about you. Why are you able to notice even this type of thing?

"No! I beg of you, escap—"

Before she had finished speaking, Enne's voice suddenly stopped.

Because the man before her eyes showed a calm smile.

"I don't want to lose any more of my acquaintances."

It was an extremely lonely smile. A smile that seemed to see though everything, and felt despair towards something.

Out of the more than ten chimera, half of them formed a group that flew forward directly ahead of her.

——[Red Song Keinez]——

The wave of heat from the flame burned everything. No, it should have burned everything. In the moment when pain burst across his hand, Xins's concentration was broken. The resulting flame was far from the small flame that the Rainbow Reciter had expected.

A chimera broke through a gap in the flame. This unexpected situation made him freeze. This was bad. There wasn't even time for Enne's own Recitation!

"Xins!"

This time, his coat would certainly be pierced by the claws of the beast. That kind of scene was on the verge of turning from illusion to reality……

From <Goetia Seventy-second pillar>, Twenty-eighth key, Berith
—orbie clar, dremre : Goetia : Berith—

Directly underneath the attacking chimera, from inside the shadow of that beast, appeared a knight driving a crimson horse.

It was a knight wearing pitch-black armor, holding a lance the same color as his armor. Due to this sudden intruder, the chimera was swatted away. Effortlessly, with one swing of the lance, the chimeras that were about to attack were also swatted away.

—It's strong.

The fact that the chimera, which were equal to a Third scale Recitation, was so easily defeated means this knight is a Second Scale Recitation? But, she had never seen this kind of Recitation before. Just who did this?

Noble Aria

The way that the knight disregarded their doubt and faded away without a trace made it seem like a dream. However, fallen chimeras that the knight had knocked down were scattered around the two of them.

"……Enne, was that your Recitation?"

Still in shock, Enne shook her head. That's my line! However, only one thing was certain. The Reciter who saved us just now wants us to survive.

"Xins, let's keep working hard."

As if protecting his back, she pressed closer to him.

"Because it's a life that we went through the trouble of taking back, even until the very last moment, we can't give up."

"—Enne, I take back what I said earlier."

Standing back to back with her, he spoke in a serious voice.

"You've changed. ……You've become strong."

***

"……Neight."

He remembered the final words of his mother, who had been lying on the bed, eaten away by her illness.

In her dying moments, what she wanted to pass on weren't words of farewell or words of love, but Night Color Recitation's First Scale Recitation— the <High Noble Aria Song of Praise Oratorio> for calling out Night Color's True Spirit.

"This is a Recitation created for your sake. Therefore, Neight, I will teach this only to you."

With a great effort, Mother extended her right hand from her place on the bed. Still averting his gaze, Neight gripped her hand in return. Mother's hand had become too skinny. Simply looking at it made him feel sad. However, he couldn't move his gaze away.

"Do you think Reciting is difficult?"

There couldn't be a correct answer to that kind of question. Although he was young, even he understood this.

But even so, right now he could only reply, “It’s difficult.” Because right now, from all of the Recitations that Mother had taught him, success couldn’t be mentioned. Failure had become natural.

“But, I think you will be able to successfully conduct this Recitation.”

Still holding onto Mother’s hand, Mother squeezed his hand slightly.

“What’s needed isn’t skill, but the feeling of wanting to protect someone you treasure. Convey that thought to True Spirit of Night. Because, the True Spirit of Night is lonely……”

Unlike before, this was the first time that she had given advice something not about his skill, but about his mind.

“Because it understands the pain of being alone, it will definitely protect you from being lonely. —Un, it will protect…… It will surely protect…… you……”

A burst of strength was transmitted through Mother's hand, which he grasped. But in the next instant, it stopped like a thread being cut.

Mother?

"Hey, Mother. Mother?"

He called out over and over again, gripping Mother's hand the whole time.

……She's just asleep, right?

Surely she will call out my name again. Surely she will grip my hand again.

Hey, isn't that right, Mother?

***

In this night (place), You (I) are in solitude (alone)

"Isa jes qusi xin fears toga peg ilmei shel"
I promised, I will send you my song
—Hir qusi clar, cori, Ema lef memori

That melody is the music (tremor) of the heart, The tone quality (dance) of tears
"jes kless qusi medolia lef cirkus, medolia lef zarabel"
That melody is the scratch (shivering) of the heart, The song of praise (festival) of tears
—jes kless qusi sari lef sophit, faite lef zarabel

It drenches the world, Because it is a drop (song) of the frozen (beloved) night
"Hir sinka I, bekwist WeR muas ririsia harmone lef twispel"
It drenches the world, Because it is the embrace (song) of the beloved night
—Hir sinka I, bekwist HIr qusi celena poe lef wevirne spil

The Song of Twilight hadn't ended. Turning imagination into reality, and singing it. The overflowing imagination in the outside world becomes sound, making eardrums resound, and then creating a circuit of new imagination.

By practicing, even without an <Song of Praise (Oratorio)>, Recitations up to the Second scale can be conducted. Just

like that Rainbow Color Reciter had done before our eyes .

But First Scale (High Noble Aria) Recitation did not follow this principle, because the True Spirit could only be called out under specific conditions. Three restraints— By only using a specific catalyst and singing a specific <Song of Praise> (Oratorio), that song can't reach the True Spirit. Only by discovering the catalyst and <Song of Praise> (Oratorio), and finally calling out its true name, it can be considered complete.

I have already heard the <Song of Praise> (Oratorio) from Mother. Next, as long as I have the catalyst, I could surely be capable of calling it out. Because Mother had said that. I have also met the promised person, as well as promised Kluele-san and Mio-san.

—I will convey those feelings to the True Spirit of Night—

I will convey them. I want to protect this place of everyone's precious memories.

Wiping away sweat, Neight continued his Recitation.

***

Carrying several sealing containers with both hands, Mio climbed up the stairs two steps at a time.

Her destination was the highest place in the second-year school building, a place where she could survey the scene below. Stealthily looking out from the classroom, the campus had long ago become a sea of fire. If she didn't hurry, her special preparations would come down to nothing.

"As long as I have this……"

Night-colored flame. The key to solving the mystery was the mixing catalysts experiment that she had done together with Neight and Kluele.

And there was one more thing. That was, when she had been chatting with Kluele a few days ago, the words they had unintentionally mentioned.

'How did Kululu do on this time's combined test? Didn't you say that you failed the guessing questions?'

'Me? About the same as last time, I just barely made it into the top one hundred. Compared to the people in my grade, I'm ranked second!'

'Eh? Because the questions this time were really easy. All you had to do was to remember what our textbook said about the reactions of each colored flame to get three questions correct.'

Creating flames which weren't a naturally existing color wasn't by magic, by chance, or through a miracle. Actually, it was a technique of mixing catalysts that everyone knows about. If a hard-working person who studies Recitations reads the textbook once, they can find the answer.

The brown containers in her arms bumped against each other. I have to hurry, but I can't let them break. If the containers crack, the substances inside will oxidize rapidly, and degenerate.

"Wait for me, Neight-kun!"

The door leading to the roof finally appeared in the far end of her field of view.

……Is this the end?

Crestfallen, Zea Lordfill knelt on the ground. The catalyst in his hands was nearly gone. Although he had sent Jessica to get more, she wouldn't return for the time being. In reality, they were already helpless.

The hydra approached them with slow movements. Their defensive line had already been broken through, and there was nothing more protecting the first-year school building where the students were taking refuge. Although there were several teachers in the first-year building as backup, their catalysts had been nearly used up.

……Just what could be done? If they issue a warning to the first-year building, they probably have to first make mental preparations for an even greater level of panic than before.

He gazed at the gradually advancing monster. Although it wasn't certain who had used the <Egg>, he didn't expect that such a monster would appear inside the school.

"……Hm?"

The hydra suddenly stopped moving, like it was frozen. Not only its footsteps, but even all of its five heads had become rigid. The only exception was its eyes. Only its eyeballs turned and glared at its surroundings ominously.

What is it looking for? Just what was it?

Unable to understand its puzzling behavior, even the elder in charge of the school could only stand still.

***

“Just now…… What happened……”

Not only her lips, but even her tongue felt dry. Even her throat hurt from the sounds she had just uttered. In a position with her back leaning against the wall of the hall , Kluele was unable to find out the situation outside.

—How long was I unconscious for?

Recited flames would usually disappear after a few minutes. Because the flame she Recited had already disappeared, it meant that it had already been a longer time than that. The bleeding from her left shoulder had also stopped. Had it been an hour? Or merely a few minutes?

"……It's quiet….."

In the hall enveloped by silence, only the sound of her voice echoed. The wind blowing from somewhere carried the crackling sound of flames. This was the first time she thought that being lonely was frightening. The first thing she thought of was the faces of her family. After that faded away, her next thought was of her friends' faces.

—Are Mio and Neight both safe and sound?

However, it would be troubling if they weren't safe. When would the teacher Kate, who had promised to return, come? But she couldn't have too many expectations right now. Under these circumstances, she didn't even know if anything had happened over at the first-year building.

She heard the clinking sound of glass being stepped on . Is it Kate-sensei?

But, the following groaning sound that entered her ears crushed that hope in a split second.

“……I hate being so stubborn.”

The beast with wounds all over its body gradually lessened the distance between them. Its moss-green body had become scorched black, and smoke rose from the mane on its lion head. It seemed that this was the chimera she had driven away before she fell unconscious. Was it unable to move its burned wings? Dragging its feet, it gradually approached her.

What to do? Use blood as a catalyst again? But I’ve already lost too much blood. If I lose more blood, I feel like I will fall into an eternal rest which I won’t be able to wake up from. This is my body, so I know it the best.

“It’ll be bad either way……”

Haven’t I already worked hard enough?

[Beloved bird who left its nest, bird who is hatching. Singer without wings.]

A voice? Again. However, she could hear this more clearly than last time.

[I am your wings. Call out my name.]

She had thought that it was merely in a dream, but she had certainly heard it. It wasn't a hallucination.

Call out— But, I don't have anything that I can use to Recite anymore.

[A catalyst is not needed to call me out. The blood you spilled has called me out until now.]

'Do you understand the reason why I asked what catalyst you will use?'

'When you were conducting the Recitation, if the catalyst you had used was not a gem but 'something else' instead—'

But, I don't even know the <Song of Praise Oratorio>……

[A <Song of Praise (Oratorio)> is not needed. Bird that must hatch, the sound of you tearing off your shell awoke me.]

'Even among True Spirits, there are those that do not use words.'

'Little girl, you are torn between two things. It is a conflict between growth and stagnation. Just like a little bird that wants to break free of its shell, but is unable to come out.'

Whose words were those? They were things she had listened to emotionlessly and without a second thought, but now welled up from the depths of her memories like a fountain.

[The three restraints have been removed, the conditions already met. You have already completed my Recitation.]

…….Completed the Recitation?

Like déjà vu, a vague scene suddenly crossed her mind .

What she had called out during the recital contest—
Enveloped in brilliant flames, emitting a dazzling radiance, illusory feathers not belonging to this world.

Feathers burning fiercely. Flames taking the shape of feathers.

That is—

That isn't a memory of the past, but a scene from this place that had certainly happened, as if it had been protecting her.

[All that remains is to call out my name. Come.]

In her weak gaze, the scorched avenger leaped at her.

But even so, her consciousness was still focused on the voice speaking to her.

[As long as you don't return to your shell, I will once again awaken from the ashes. As long as you don't turn your back to me, we will be able to meet a new dawn together. Kluele Sophi Net. Come, call out my name.]

From her pale lips, Kluele let out a faint breath.

The Red Song that even sound couldn't resist.

But, the song sung by the girl crossed through the hall, crossed over the school—

Somewhere in the world, the heart of the thing waiting for this very moment trembled.

The beast's claws touched something. Something soft.

Although it wanted to rip it apart, contrarily, the beast's claws were engulfed by flames. What his claws had caught onto wasn't the girl's flesh, but the great crimson wing in front of her.

[I have always been waiting for you to be born. Kluele, my perch.]

While one of its wings protected the girl, the bird flapped its other wing.

Just that one motion. With just that, a scorching wave of heat filled the hall. After emitting Recitation light, the chimera was forcibly sent away.

[Can you move?]

Kluele gritted her teeth and stood up, but this already took all of her strength. Moving any more was impossible. She was sure that if she let her mind relax, she would fall back into unconsciousness. Her mind wouldn't follow her body.

[In that case, let me carry you. Come, tell me the path you wish to take.]

After saying that, the red True Spirit—
Divine Bird Phoenix of Dawn used its wings to embrace the girl.

[Until the ends of the world, if you wish it. Kluele, where will you fly to?]

The first place to cross her mind was the first-year building where her friends were taking refuge. Had Ada, Serges, and all of her other classmates safely taken shelter? As long as they could reach the school building, surely they were safe.

Next, she thought of the figure of the girl wearing a pearl-colored dress. The girl who had always accompanied her, and said that she would go get the supplies necessary for creating Night-colored flames. However, if it was her, she wouldn't take reckless risks.

Although she always acted childish, she displayed her intelligence when it was an important time. This was something Kluele knew well.

"I……"

Finally, she thought of the face of the young, still learning Reciter who wore a deep blue robe. Nobody used the same Recitation as him, the lonely Reciter. The easily dejected, introverted song user who always failed. Only that child requires someone by his side. Someone who could encourage him when he fails, and enjoy the happiness together with him if he succeeds.

—Someone who could wait by his side and quietly watch over him.

[Have you decided?]

The bird deity urged her a second time. Silently, Kluele nodded.

Covered in sweat, Neight's shoulders moved up and down as he gasped for breath.

The air filled with blazing heat burned his lungs. The expanding shimmer of hot air made him dizzy.

The flames snatched away oxygen and gave him a headache. The temperature sapped away his physical strength and ate away at his body.

But, even so— he continued to sing.

Crossing over the flames, crossing over the campus, crossing over the school…… For the sake of her, who was somewhere in the world, listening for this song.

Part 4

"Already…… The fire is……!"

She understood after she saw it from the roof. The whole school was engulfed in a sea of fire. Only the area around the first-year building was peaceful, which caused a huge weight to lift off her heart.

"Neight, you idiot. It's too unreasonable."

Although the fact that the campus was covered in fire made her afraid, when she saw him standing in the middle of the fire, she almost dropped the things that she

carried in both arms. It seemed that if she had arrived even a little bit later, she would have been baked.

"……But, this shows how much he believes in me."

I don't want to let down his expectations and trust. I will show him how to call out Night-colored flames.

She moved one of the things she carried in her arms into one hand. Next, all I have to do is throw this into the midst of the fire. By doing so, the campus will be filled with Night-colored flames. What she was about to do, was merely a junior chemistry experiment that everyone had done before.

Night-colored flames. Its true identity is 'flame reaction'.

Normally, flames burn with a red color. However, if a specific metal is added to the flame, it will have an entirely different appearance. When some kind of metallic salt, for example alkali metals and alkaline earth metals, are added to the flame and heated, the electrons of the metal atoms created after oxidization will be in a high energy state.

But because the resulting state is unstable, the energized electrons will turn back to their base condition. When the electron changes to a low energy state, the disparity in energy between the two states will cause energy to be released in the form of light. When the light's wavelength reaches the wavelength of visible light, the flame will appear to take on the metal's natural color.

—In other words, to create flames that will emit Night-colored light.

A silvery-white metal with a soft structure, and can immediately oxidize in air.

Element number 37 'Rb' —Rubidium.

It comes from the word 'rubidius[red-purple fire]'. This can cause Night-colored fire to wake up.

Night Color Recitations. The Recitation that shouldn't exist is completed by using flames that shouldn't exist.

Now all there is to do is believe in him, just like how he believed in me.

"Neight-kun, it's coming!"

With all of her strength, Mio threw the containers from the roof down to the campus.

The five-headed hydra instinctively looked around at its surroundings.

It felt a bad premonition. Although it didn't know where the chill came from, something was about to threaten it.

It has no rivals. It understood that, but was concerned by it.

That must be eliminated.

Rapidly, the white-colored head conveyed a signal to the other heads.

Everything must be eliminated.

The green one agreed.

But, where is our enemy?

The yellow head and blue head questioned suspiciously.

Don’t know. But, we must find it.

Four heads, eight lines of sight glared at its surroundings.

……That.

Suddenly, the red head, which had remained silent until now, moved. Its gaze was aimed at the area where flames burned fiercely.

That fire, when had it turned into that kind of black color? Until now, those flames had been the same color as me.

All of the heads turned their view towards the indicated direction. Ten eyes gazed at the small creature within the flames. Wearing the blazing black flames like clothes, the small, seemingly insignificant Reciter.

—That?

Is that the opponent we must eliminate?

***

“Xins…… What is this?”

Enne, who was in charge of protecting his back, muttered in a small voice.

……What?

Holding a catalyst in his right hand, he raised his eyebrow.

“—This is…… A song?”

When he listened attentively, at that moment, Xins’s whole body shook.

The tender tone crossed over the campus, crossed over the flames, peacefully penetrating the entire school.

The roaring sound of flames. The fiercely blowing wind. However, amidst those, he could hear a faint melody.

Sorrowful and lonesome, but a somehow nostalgic tune.

He had heard this somewhere before—

Let the Night Color's woven song (oath) come to you
"Yer she saria stig lef xeoi peg pel"
Night Color's celebratory chant (oath) beneath you, Everywhere (long), Eternally (long), Forever
—Yer she saria stig lef xeoi, Yer zayixuy-c-olfey she ora

O forgotten child
"U da lostasia dremren"
Even if the world (everyone) forgets you, I will not forget about you
—O la laspha, yupa Lom dremre neckt lostasia U meide

The frozen feelings in his heart were revived for a moment.

—This song is…… That time's……

There wasn't any possibility other than that. A Recitation poem filled with tragic emotions, longing for an end, a tune desiring loneliness.

But now, the lyrics were different. The one singing is…… No, it shouldn't be Evhemary.

The lyrics, timing, and singer were all different. But even so, only that tune is— No matter how much time passes, it hadn't changed or lost its delicate and pure sound.

Come, O child who has been born
"Isa da boema foton doremren"
Come, O child who has been born, A new wind has begun to blow
—Isa da boema foton doremren O hearsa neighti loar

Welcome back to the midst of slumber (cradle)
"O univa sm thes hypne"
The time of slumber (cradle) ends, Because the promised bell declares it
—eposion lef hypne, eposion lef xeo, elmei jes muas defea

And then I—
"ende Years besti……"
And then you
—ende Wer she pridia……

The woven song paused momentarily. That foretold the end of the <Song of Praise Oratorio>. The song's ending stanza arrived at the last bar of music.

He was finally able to hear the end —At that time, the girl had personally stopped the Recitation poem.

The poem of Night he had been waiting for was finally completed. The final lyrics that had never been sung before……

"……So there was……a continuation……"

The memories and melody overlapped. It was engraved in his heart even now, that girl's tears.

Within the nearly eternal passage of time, the final dream had become hazy like a phantom.

Everything— Xins remembered.

***

Had it noticed……?

The approaching rumble in the ground caused Arma to narrow his eyes. What an amazing guy. Even though the Recital Gate (Channel) still hadn't opened, it could sense the

minute presence leaking out from the <Song of Praise (Oratorio)>. But this was also because the creature that was about to be called out was fairly powerful.

Did he make it in time? Even looking at it optimistically, the situation was still very dangerous.

Neight's song had already ended. Next, by adding a catalyst, the conditions for a First Scale Recitation (High Noble Aria) would be met.

But, the flame hadn't changed color. It was still red.

Although he felt uneasy, but…… Right now, there was still enough time to escape. He couldn't lose Neight here, or else he would be unable to face Neight's mother.

"I will wait."

He hadn't spoken his thoughts aloud, but the boy who had been standing by his side for a long time had already sensed them.

"I promised Mio-san."

Not even blinking, Neight stared at the crimson wall of fire.

That action made Arma sigh for the first time in his life . Faced with the crisis approaching before his eyes, the boy had chosen to make an oath at the most uncertain hour, not knowing whether or not it could be accomplished.

He hadn't noticed until now. He had thought that Neight's personality didn't resemble his mother's, but he seemed to have inherited her stubbornness.

……However, perhaps it is because of this that I am attracted to Neight.

[It doesn't matter. Just do as you like, I will accompany you until the very end.]

While he spoke those words, a sharp sound— The sound of breaking glass bottles resounded throughout the campus.

When the sharp shattering sounds faded away, the surrounding flames were dyed in the color of night.

Mio-san, thank you.

All of the conditions are fulfilled. ……Next, it's time to see whether or not I have the skill.

He breathed out all of the air that had settled in his lungs.

[I will watch until the very end.]

He nodded at the Night-colored Recited creature.

Although it was Night-colored flames, its temperature hadn't changed. Flames as a catalyst. Although it was of the highest quality, it was also the hardest to control. By making even one mistake, the strength of his concentration and imagination that he had accumulated up until now would all be broken. There was no second chance.

Even with his naked eyes, he could confirm that the hydra was coming towards him. Five colors being used simultaneously, called out a Recited creature that exceeded human knowledge. And above its heads were a large amount of chimera that could be counted by the tens.

But Mother said, the True Spirit of Night will surely protect everyone.

……Everything depends on me……

The strength of his concentration didn't waver. However, he could feel a different portion being eroded by heavy pressure. His whole body was covered in sweat from the heat, and it soaked into his robe.

Even if he stood there motionless, he still felt dizzy. When he thought to breathe deeply and straighten his back—

———Eh? ———

Just then, his body lost balance.

A migraine. His whole body felt lethargic. His sight was fuzzy, and his whole field of vision became a mirage. Because he had been overly focused on the <Oratorio Song of Praise>, he hadn't noticed anything abnormal about his body until now.

Acute heatstroke. The wave of heat emitted by the surrounding flames was too much for the body of a thirteen year old boy.

[Neight!]

Even the sound of Arma's voice sounded like a hallucination. He who had collapsed amidst the black flames, felt like the consciousness of a different person. The sweet temptation was like being in a dream.

No. I can't just collapse like this. Even though he understood this, his legs wouldn't move.

As if about to embrace the boy, the black flames extended its arms.

Eh…… I can't. I definitely can't. I promised. I already made promises with many people.

Because I want to do something. I want to do something for everyone's sake……

Before the flames licked Neight.

Someone supported the boy wearing a robe. Someone jumped in between him and the flames. Neight clung to that hand without being aware of it. —But, who?

“Neight, like usual, you’re forcing yourself too much.”

With a knocking sound, a fist lightly struck his head.

“I can’t help you conduct the Recitation, but, I can at least stay by your side—”

—Mother?

He thought that voice was an illusion. But, I’m certainly holding onto that arm.

He rubbed his eyes. The person in front of his eyes wasn't Mother. A pure white dress filled his vision. After he lifted his head, he saw a girl with a bandage wrapped around her left shoulder.

"……Kluele-san?"

The girl nodded, and gave a faint smile.

"……No way, how did you come here? No, before that , hurry up and escape! The fire is already out of hand, and the hydra is coming!"

She didn't respond at all to his explanation, but only gazed at him with calm, steady eyes.

"Is the <Song of Praise(Oratorio)> completed?"

His lips didn't move. Before he knew it, the hallucination vanished, and the illusionary figure disappeared. He couldn't even hear the sound of crackling flames surrounding him. Only her figure was reflected in his field of view, only her voice resounded in the depths of his heart.

After nodding, that girl gripped his right hand.

"It's okay. I will also stay with you. Let's sing together."

For the first time, Neight felt glad amidst the flames.

Because the surrounding heat could sweep away what was flowing out of his eyes.

"Thank you very much. ……This time, I'm really okay now."

In the sky— As if it was blessing the two of them, the bird deity's red feathers fluttered down like layers of snowflakes.

Together, the Night Color Reciter and the girl willingly stretched their hands into the Night-colored flames.

The Night-colored flames didn't burn the two people. Its radiance illuminated them brilliantly.

Twilight-colored light floated in the sky above—

Neight sang the promised song, the promised name.

And then I—
“ende Years besti……”
And then you
—ende Wer she pridia……

Woman of origin, of twilight (Evhe), You smile in the dawn[7]
Ive lef Armalaspha— La Selah she maria sm neight

Final Play: The Joy of Your Desires —Evhe Smiles at Dawn—

Part 1

"Say..... Ada..... What do you think that is?"

In classroom 1-B. As they were taking refuge in the classroom and holding their breaths, Serges came over and stealthily whispered in Ada's ear. Because she didn't see any chimera, she opened the closed curtains just a little bit and peeked outside.

"What do you mean? There's nothing, isn't there?"

Although they exchanged places and she looked outside, all she saw was the pitch-black sky spreading out endlessly.

"Wrong way. Look over in that direction!"

Serges's finger pointed in the direction of the campus. They stared in that direction for a few seconds. The sky was wriggling.

"Eh....."

Finally, she understood what her classmate had said.

That wasn't the sky. What she had thought was the sky , were actually deep blueish-purple flames. The Night-colored flames burned in the campus were converging overhead. Their concentration turned to where the huge vortex of flames were concentrated at a small point. Before they noticed it, a dimly shining Recital Channel Gate had been born. Because it was so big, she didn't notice it until it had been pointed out.

What is that? The Recital Channel Gate that they didn't know the reason for, it was way too gigantic. They had never seen such a showy Recital Channel Gate before.

The gate's radiance increased and suddenly burst open .

That was proof that the Recitation had been completed .

".....Eh?"

Exhausted, Mio leaned against the railing on the rooftop.

Channel

The Recital Gate's radiance grew. Even she clearly

Channel

understood that at that moment, the Recital Gate had completely opened.

High Noble Arias

True Spirits called out by First Scale Recitations were extremely varied but they all had one thing in common. That hydra, the green wyvern, and other creatures

High Noble Arias

summoned by First Scale Recitations were absurdly huge .

Channel

Just what sort of huge thing was coming out from that Recital Gate? She even forgot to blink while staring, but, even though the gate had burst open, there was nothing coming out.

No way, did it fail?

Although she wanted to confirm it, because the flames that were illuminating the campus had disappeared, the campus was plunged into darkness for a second time.

"What just happened....."

The only thing that entered her vision was the gigantic shadow that had broken into the school grounds. She

didn't know the reason why, but that monster suddenly changed direction and set foot into the campus.

If the recitation had failed, then there was nothing that could be done. There wasn't enough time to conduct another First Scale Recitation. The hydra drew closer to the center of the campus, the place where Neight was until a little while ago. But because of the darkness, she couldn't see his figure. She wasn't even sure if he was able to escape.

High Noble Aria

Rather, she didn't want to see him. If Neight was still there where the light turned on.....

But, with almost ironic timing, the neon lights that had been off now turned back on. The school lit up once again. For a second time, the campus was brilliantly illuminated.

—Please. Don't be there. Please have run away.

Although her eyelids felt burned by that scorching radiance, nevertheless she stared at that place— and felt a burst of dizziness.

.....I can't believe it.

He remained standing in place. Furthermore, next to him was the figure of her friend who was supposed to be resting in the hall.

"Neight, Kululu, run awaaaaaaayyyy!"

Mio raised her voice from the rooftop. There was no way they could hear her. But even so, she couldn't help but shout. At this rate the three of them would be trampled by that monster..... Eh?..... Three of them?

Her eyesight hadn't gone bad. The boy wearing a deep blue colored robe, that was Neight. The girl wearing the white dress, that person was Kluele. The last person was also standing at the place where they was.

That person was pitch black, like their whole body was wrapped in black cloth. Who is that?

No. Impossible.

Although she had thought that the True Spirit of Night was something large, could it be—

'That' didn't materialize from the Recital Channel Gate.

Instead, at the moment the Recital Gate burst, something arose out of Neight's shadow.

The three-dimensional shadow slowly straightened its back. But even so, it was clearly small, just like herself. No, it was even shorter. Height. In other words, not body length or size.

Because, the thing before eyes had the figure of a human.

Its body was jet-black, but gave a transparent impression. A human clad in shadows. Furthermore, its form seemed feminine. It was like the girl drenched in pitch-black paint from the beginning— In short, that was probably the closest analogy.

But, not long before Kluele steadily gazed at it, the boy that it stood next to suddenly collapsed unsteadily.

"—Neight?"

The boy was on the verge of collapsing backwards. Barely in the nick of time, Kluele supported him with her right shoulder. But no matter how many times she called

out, he didn't reply. His eyes remained closed. Was he unconscious? At a time like this, when the hydra would be coming soon—

[Because that feeling of tension suddenly eased.]

Kluele looked over her shoulder. The True Spirit of Night had come and stood beside them.

[However, he should be praised for doing such a good job holding on.]

It stretched out a shadow in the shape of a hand. The fingertip of the shadow gently stroked the boy's face.

"Are you the True Spirit of Night?"

[It would seem so wouldn't it? Kluele-san.]

Kluele was startled after suddenly being called by her name. Just like the divine bird she had called out, why did even the True Spirit of Night know her name?

[Fufu, that child told me.]

The True Spirit turned her head, looking upwards. In that direction— Like it had assembled in the starry night

sky, a large creature flapped its wings overhead. It was gigantic. Although she only measured it by eye, in terms of size it might even be comparable to the hydra.

The floating silhouette that the school's lights shone on ..... Is that a dragon?

The hydra increased its speed, causing cracks in the earth. While catching a glimpse of it in her peripheral vision, the True Spirit of Night looked up at the sky.

[Arma, I'll take that on as an opponent. Go help Kluele-san and Neight hide.]

——Understood——

The low, heavy tone was like the ringing of the lowest key of a pipe organ. Was that truly its voice. It made Kluele wonder whether the sound’s vibration would land on her head. No, but more importantly.

Arma? Wasn't that a name she know?

.....No way, this dragon overhead is.....

[Didn’t I say a long time ago that I’m not a lizard? But there’s no time to chat leisurely right now. It's coming.]

The jet-black dragon landed right behind her. The gust of wind caused her hair to sway.

[Evhe, I'll leave that to you. Little girl, carry Neight and quickly get on.]

"Kluele-san—”

For a moment, Kluele saw the illusion that someone was behind her. Just like the Divine Bird (Phoenix) of Dawn and Arma, that person had a voice that seemed to come out of nowhere. The voice suspended in air was a human woman's voice.

"Thank you very much. Neight by himself would never have been able to call me out. It is surely because of you that I am now here. In Neight's place, I thank you. If you are able to, please continue helping this child."

'This child'? That was not a normal way of speaking. It was almost like she was speaking about her own child. Isn't it unfitting for a True Spirit to use such wording when talking about humans?

Before she had time to decide whether to ask that question or not, Kluele’s body floated upwards. Without

any warning, the Night-colored dragon had grabbed the two of them in his foreleg and flapped its wings.

"Wa-Wait, carry us more carefully!"

While still burdened with Neight, Arma had grabbed them. Although he wasn't flying very fast, because of the unstable footing, a little mistake could shake them off. And even more importantly, the dragon was flying in an awkward manner. Could it be a bad habit? Compared to the bird deity that she had come here with, he was too clumsy.

[Because I haven't flown in a long time.]

He said brazenly with an innocent expression. That arrogant tone of voice made her even more convinced. She had no doubt. This dragon was truly the Recited creature that she was familiar with.

"....You gigantic flying lizard."

[Do you have something to say?]

At the companion who always constantly returned her questions, Kluele shook her head in resignation.

"Nothing. More importantly, if you're so huge like that , you should have come out in the first place!"

[The <Woman of Origin> and I are Duet-type Recitations. If one wing isn’t called out, the other wing can’t come out either.]

This was the first time she had heard of this special type. But other than that, there were still a lot of things she wanted to ask.

"......Just who is that True Spirit?"

The True Spirit of Night still stood below them. But somehow, it was different. Exactly what it was, Kluele didn't know. However, it felt different from the divine bird from before and also from this Night-colored Lizard. If there was a line dividing humans and True Spirits, then that True Spirit was standing on the line.

“You called her Evhe, right? Is that the True Spirit’s name?”

[She doesn’t have a name. Evhe is the name I gave to the girl who voluntarily abandoned her own name.]

From the low altitude he had been flying at, the jet-black dragon suddenly flew higher. But despite the roar of the wind in her ears, the True Spirit's voice still retained its clear quality.

[Evhe— The <Woman of Origin> who brought the Night Color Recitations into this world.]

Brought the Night Color Recitations into this world? That reply made her stare at the boy she carried on her shoulder.

“Eh? But, wasn’t that Neight?”

[You’ve probably heard about it. The one who constructed Night Color Recitations wasn’t Neight, but his mother.]

Kluele became increasingly confused. Neight's mother should have already passed away. She understood that Neight's mother had created Night Color Recitations, but why was the True Spirit of Night's name Evhe?

Before she could ask, Arma quickly gave her a request.

[Cover your ears. There is something I must do.]

"......Must do?"

[Howl.]

That one simple word caused her whole body to shake with fright.

Howl..... Wa-Wait a minute! My left hand is injured and my right hand is carrying Neight. There's no way for me to cover my ears, so please restrain yourself—

Her wish was in vain. When the jet-black dragon let loose a howl, Kluele lost consciousness for a single moment.

Master's single wing (transient master) — My name is < One who bares his fangs (Armadeus)>

[O she saira qersonie Laspha — Armadeus. Captivated by the daughter of the dark lonely night, invited by that righteous successor. In accordance with the Recitation of Night, I will make it known to the world!]

That voice was not heard just at the school, but was even transmitted to the ends of the world.

The hydra didn't chase the dragon flying in the sky, but set its sights on the small True Spirit remaining on the ground.

It smelt a dangerous scent from that gigantic dragon. However, even more unpleasant was the small True Spirit that still stood before its eyes.

It could sense something threatening coming from this True Spirit.

The hydra spat out a long, scorching hot breath and once again changed the campus to a sea of flames. The place where the True Spirit of Night stood up until now had completely burned up.

Without a trace, the True Spirit of Night disappeared from the place it had just been standing. Just before the hydra judged that it was too quick.

"Too bad, but this school is also an important place to me."

The hydra heard that voice coming from overhead. Turning in the direction of the voice, its five heads glared at its surroundings in search of the enemy.

"Let me express my thanks for coming along and doing whatever you please."

Before long, ten eyes concentrated on one end of the campus. At a height of easily twenty meters above ground.

At the center of the campus, on a metal pole used for lighting, the jet-black True Spirit towered directly overhead.

***

"Hey, Mirror, are we dreaming?"

Forgetting to even wipe away the sweat running down his face, Zessel continued to look up at the dragon overhead. In the middle of the night-colored curtain, the jet-black dragon that flapped its wings in the air was too large and majestic. It should unmistakably be a Recited creature, but just what color did that True Spirit belong to?

"......I just remembered something from long ago. Something from a very long time ago."

The teacher who wore glasses sighed.

"How unexpected. So did I."

Forgetting to blink at the Night-colored True Spirit, Zessel let out another sigh.

Even though half of it had already settled into the deepest parts of his memory, he recalled the words that had lain dormant for ten years.

—What I want to do is Night Color Recitations—

In the time of Elfand Academy, the one girl in the class who hadn't socialized with anyone and sat by herself in a corner of the classroom. When he had chosen to devote himself to Red Recitations, Mirror chose Blue Recitations, and Enne chose White Recitations, only one girl struggled to pursue a non-existing color.

However, it couldn't be her, could it? First of all, if she had completed Night Color Recitations, her name should have resounded throughout the world. Just like the Rainbow Reciter's had been.

And then.

At that moment, the jet-black dragon howled.

Master's single wing (transient master) — My name is < One who bares his fangs (Armadeus)>

[O she saira qersonie Laspha — Armadeus. Captivated by the daughter of the dark lonely night, invited by that righteous successor. In accordance with the Recitation of Night, I will make it known to the world!]

In accordance with the Recitation of Night—

Daughter of the dark lonely night—

No Way.....

".....Ha, Ahahaha, how could it be!"

With his hand on his forehead, Zessel let out a loud laugh. From the corners of his eyes, something spilled out.

He could only laugh self-mockingly. The girl who had been looked down upon by everyone in the classroom. The girl who had been neglected by the teacher and the school. And yet, isn't this school being protected right now by her hands?

Should he praise her? Or should he mourn for her? What on earth should he do?

What have we—

"Just how foolish have I been, I wonder."

"......Jessica-sensei?"

It was the one who should have been inside the school building leading students to refuge, Elfand's former teacher.

"You..... You were right, weren't you, Evhemary."

Without even wiping away her tears, the head teacher just wholeheartedly and repeatedly called out her former student's name.

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“Wha-What’s with that sudden howl!”

With her hands covering her still-buzzing ears, Kluele roared back. From her point of view, it really was a terrible disaster.

[The girl knew that her time of death was approaching . Tales like that can be found all over the world. However , even though most of humanity had accepted this, she was unwilling to accept her fate. If I disappear without doing anything, then for what purpose did I exist— She wished to leave behind proof of her existence in this world.]

In contrast to the prior roaring sound, with a voice like it was suppressing the silence, Arma continued to speak as if he was talking to himself.

[What she thought of was Recitations. Embracing the idea to create a new type of Recitation, she threw herself into her research. But when her newly-invented Recitation was half-complete, her body had already begun to erode from her illness. While feeling uneasy

and afraid, unsure if she had enough time, she met a boy. That encounter literally changed her fate.]

After pausing for a while, as if hesitating to find the right words, Arma continued talking.

[Not long after their encounter, the boy requested a competition with her. Or maybe it would be more accurately called a challenge. What they had bet on was — To see who could first master the Recitation they were pursuing.]

"Why did something like that change her fate?"

[Because the girl felt fulfilled. Until then, she had always been lonely. Because she knew her time of death was approaching, she did not associate with other people . Then she found someone willing to acknowledge her. Someone to acknowledge her, meaning someone who would remember her. Because of this, she didn't need to create a Recitation as proof of her existence anymore. After that, the girl's feelings began to waver.]

Kluele also knew that feeling, to the point of being pained. She also understood why she sympathized with the girl.

Because a few days ago, she had a similar experience herself.

—Kluele-san is definitely suited to becoming a Reciter —

Only because there was someone to acknowledge her, she was able to feel at ease.

[Just like what the boy had done to her, the girl also wanted to become a person who could cure someone's loneliness. That was the conclusion she arrived at. She wanted to travel across the world, comforting people with the same pain as her. But even if she wanted to do that, she did not have much time left to live. At the same time, she also sincerely wanted to fulfill the promise with the boy of who could master their Recitation first. But no matter what she did, there was no way to accomplish both of those desires. Therefore—]

The talkative creature's crescent-moon pupils wavered slightly.

[For the sake of accomplishing both, the girl threw away her name.]

Regret. Indecision. Envy. Lamentation. Just how many emotions were mixed together in his eyes? Despite seeing it from up close, Kluele couldn't tell.

[The so-called Recitation called out the things she longed for. The girl thought, ‘Since it’s like this, could I be called out after I am dead?’ She willingly became the ruler of the Recitation she constructed— in other words, she became the True Spirit.]

Such a thing, is that even possible? It wasn't something she could immediately believe.

———And yet, why?

The eyes of the speaker seemed like it could compel anyone to believe it…… No, it caused others to have no choice but to believe, filled with an ice-cold yet beautiful sorrow.

"That, was that a story about something that really happened.....?"

[Who knows? Perhaps there’s no meaning to it, or perhaps it’s merely a fairy tale…… But……]

The corners of the dragon's mouth softened slightly. The facial expression wasn't as clear as that of humans, but Kluele understood. Certainly, that was a smile.

[The roar from before was my farewell gift to the girl.]

That girl? This time, Kluele didn't ask the question, but instead shut her mouth.

[Well, let's take care of the chimera. Hold on tight!]

Right now? While carrying me?

Don't joke around. With your clumsy way of flight, it's scary enough just flying around, and now to have a battle in the air? No matter how many lives I have, there wouldn't be enough for this!

[This is a great opportunity to prove that I'm not an ordinary lizard, don't you think?]

"……Didn't you hear me? You gigantic Night-colored flying lizard with wings……"

He grinned broadly. But unlike before, the True Spirit had a clearly mischievous smile.

Well then.....

From the top of an iron pole, the Night-colored True Spirit surveyed the academy. Flames rose in every direction. The school buildings and other buildings had all suffered damage. In the dark sky overhead, a considerable number of chimeras still remained. How dare those things rampage around this place.

—Please protect this school.

That was the that child's Reciter's wish.

Since the True Spirit had been called out, she had to fulfill her duty. But moreover, there was one more thing. If her personal feelings were to be considered, then that hydra had already committed an unforgivable crime.

Yes. It's your fault that his arm is broken.

"Even though it's our first reunion after about ten years, ruining it is a great sin!"

The <Woman of Origin> leaped off the iron pole into the air.

Her voice was filled with anger, but also included a faint feeling of delight.

Part 2

One versus several tens. Although they faced only one opponent, of the original nearly one hundred chimeras, less than half remained. Just when she wanted to confirm the exact number, another one was shot down. Some were knocked down by a sweeping tail, others were batted away by wings. Their overwhelming number didn ’t give the chimeras an advantage.

“What is……that?”

It was only a single intruder, a dragon with a midnight-colored appearance. Not counting the hydra, this was Enne’s first time seeing a Recited creature with such a large body. A True Spirit? But what Color is it?

“—Seems like it was in time.”

The close voice made her jump. The voice sounded like it came from directly behind her. It was just between Xins and herself, from a place where their shadows overlapped.

She didn't reply. Turning her head, she saw a "shadow " the size of a human standing there. Its whole body wasn't dark like being covered in black paint. Instead, it had a transparent impression and gave off a Night-colored luster. Also, its shape reminded her of the silhouette of a ten-year-old girl.

A True Spirit? It was a First Scale Recitation's Recited creature, surpassing things like Second Scale Recitation's Noble Aria small yellow spirit Will-o'-wisp and small red spirit Salamandes. Those were generally enormous creatures like a dragon, but it was the first time she had seen a True Spirit with a human figure like this.

"Enne."

When the Recited creature suddenly called out her name, her body automatically stiffened.

"It's already too dangerous here. You should know, right? A fight between True Spirits will turn their surroundings into scorched earth. I don't know when the sparks will start flying, so take refuge near the first-year school building."

Her heartbeat became noticeably louder. You should know, right— what did those words mean? This True Spirit spoke as if she seemed to know her.

It was the first time she had seen it. That's right, this should be the first time she had met the True Spirit. …… But, why did she feel so uneasy?

"Xins and I will draw away the hydra. Those two friends by the first-year school building seem to be getting tired, so you should go help them out."

The figure of the girl threw at her a leather bag that she had gotten somewhere. As she caught it, a jangling sound rang out from the leather bag. It was filled with catalyst gemstones?

"Now, go."

"B-But—"

The True Spirit seemed to sigh and crossed her arms.

"Enne Revinesia. Your personality of being concerned about everyone still hasn't changed."

"Eh?"

Forty-first key from the <Goetia seventy-second pillar >, Focalor
—orbie clar, dremre : Goetia : Focalor—

At that moment, the shadow stretching beneath Enne's feet swelled. A griffon with wings the color of wet feathers floated up. This is, using my shadow as a catalyst?

"Take her with you. When you arrive, lend your assistance there."

[As you wish.]

A low, heavy voice seemed to resound directly into Enne's head. Nodding, the griffon began to flap its wings .

"W-Why does a True Spirit know my full na-……"

The rest of her words were drowned out by the sound of the griffon's wings.

Just who are you? Before she received an answer, there was a breath of silence.

The True Spirit's body that was made of shadow had no eyes or mouth. Her expression couldn't be read. But strangely, she knew that the True Spirit had winked at her.

"Because I'm your classmate."

……What's that supposed to mean?

The griffon picked her up and left the ground. In the split second that she blinked, it had already flown up three stories high. Xins and the mysterious True Spirit who remained on the ground had become the size of her pinky.

"Hey…… Really, who are you?"

She muttered, unable to be heard by anyone but herself. Even if she shouted, they probably couldn't hear her. An empty feeling like she had been left behind remained in her heart.

If you're someone I met long ago—

Long ago, just how far back is that? Definitely before I became a teacher. Then before that… When I was still a student?

She thought back. When she was a student, her dream had been to call out a Pegasus. Zessel and Mirror were also now teaching students about Recitations. They had also achieved the Recitation they wanted during middle school. Xins had also become the Rainbow Color Reciter recognized by everyone.

Many people had achieved their dreams. They had all become Reciters acknowledged by everyone. Their Recitations were accepted by everyone. Nobody could laugh at their ambitions.

—Speaking of which, hadn't there been a child who was the complete opposite?

A girl who always sat in a corner of the classroom. A single girl not acknowledged by anyone.

But Enne couldn't remember her name. Only the Recitation she aimed for still remained in Enne's mind.

Night Color Recitations. The Recited creature that she was riding on was the same color as the sky overhead. Speaking of which, the mysterious knight that had helped her and Xins a while ago was also the same color —

“No way…… Is it you? Hey, is it you———”

Why? Why?!

Although she seemed to call out in midair, the only thing she couldn’t say was the girl’s name.

***

Night Color Recitations. Moreover, this is a First Scale Recitation, the True Spirit of Night?

Why the girl before his eyes was here, Xins instinctively realized. It didn’t matter who had called her out. As he clenched his teeth at the dull pain that came with every breath, he saw the sudden visitor.

Was this by chance……

The voice of the True Spirit before him was the same as the voice of the girl in his memories. And not just the voice. Her height. Figure. Everything reminded him of the girl. But, how could such a thing happen?

Not even a drop of moisture remained in his parched mouth. Therefore, he couldn't gulp. Unnoticeably, the pain in his left hand and the noise of his surroundings had faded away.

He felt a strange sensation of floating, as if he had entered into another world.

Just like a world in which only he and the True Spirit before him existed.

"Is your hand okay? It's fractured, isn't it?"

All too suddenly, the True Spirit touched his left hand, something that a shadow shouldn't be able to do. He didn't consider her to be acting too intimately, because from a long time ago, there was a single person he was this familiar with.

Just one person. In other words, there wasn't any other person who came to mind. Everything was the same as back then. A nostalgic feeling that he couldn't put into words filled the crevice in his heart. A crevice that had lasted more than ten years.

"You acted rashly, didn't you? How unlike you."

A finger that should have been made of shadow traced over his left hand. There was warmth in that finger. There was no way he could accept everything that was happening before his eyes. But, he simply couldn't deny that warmth.

"……Is it you?"

Amidst his chaotic emotions, something even he didn't know emerged. An imperceptible fear and awe. Nostalgia and love. Xins put all of these feelings he couldn't understand into a word.

—Evhemary.

"I kept my promise."

It was unclear which was the front and which was the back of the jet-black figure. But despite that, Xins certainly saw. From inside the Night-colored veil that the girl wore, she smiled teasingly.

"Are you surprised?"

Her simple way of talking resounded in his chest.

……You haven't changed.

She was just like before. After a long time had passed, the girl he knew was in front of him.

The rainbow color that expressed everything wasn't there, replaced by a single color. She was his only rival, the friend who acknowledged him, and possibly above all else, his companion.

Narrowing his eyes, Xins shook his head.

"I'm already used to you doing things that go against common sense."

From a distance away, the shaking of the ground drew closer.

Don’t you want an explanation? The girl seemed to say .

“You kept the promise. That’s more than enough……”

The girl turned around. So he wouldn’t see. So he wouldn’t find out. She rubbed her eyes.

“But, I still haven’t seen your Recitation yet.”

The girl turned to face the hydra that gradually drew closer.

“He seems unexpectedly strong. Can you be my backup, Rainbow Color Reciter-san?”

He didn’t answer. Simply nodding once, Xins turned around as his coat fluttered.

***

[I’ve disposed of most of them.]

Landing on the rooftop, Arma folded his wings. Rather than saying most, it would be more appropriate to call it entirely wiped out. Looking up at the sky, there was only the pale white moonlight and twinkling of the stars.

"……I'll never accompany you on flying practice again ."

For the sake of dodging the chimeras' attacks, he had dived down and swooped up, making Kluele lose her breath. As for the number of somersaults the Night-colored lizard did, she had lost count after ten. Because of all that, Kluele felt like her lifespan had shortened. She envied Neight, who had lost consciousness.

"Hey, don't you need to help over there?"

"You mean the <Woman of Origin>?"

Shouldn't this dragon be suitable for fighting against the hydra? The size of their bodies was on par, and he probably wouldn't lose in terms of strength either. So

then why was the True Spirit with the appearance of a girl purposely taking on the monster? That, she didn't understand.

[Leaving this warm and safe place isn't an easy thing to do.]

Like always, she didn't get the point of this Recited creature's words.

[Those two have already crawled out of their shells. That's why I'm leaving it to them. There's no need to worry.]

"Who do you mean by 'those two'?"

[The girl and the promised boy. Those two have already wasted more than ten years, so it can't be helped.]

It was useless. Before the lizard had started explaining, he was already in his own world.

Turning away from Arma, Kluele leaned Neight against the railing.

[Someday you will understand as well.]

Kluele turned around at the meaningful words. At the same time, a flash of light burned her eyes. Before she had realized it, the eastern sky had become brighter.

—Dawn was drawing closer.

Part 3

The Night-colored spear that the <Woman of Origin> released pierced the hydra. Letting out an angry roar, the blue head spat out a large amount of water like a sudden rain shower. A second later, it turned into an enormous block of ice. Immediately, the yellow head let out a roar accompanied by lightning.

The red snake spat red-hot breaths at the dodging girl.

——[Blue Song Ruguz]——

Just before the flames hit the True Spirit of Night, they were blocked by a film of water that Xins called out.

……This is bad.

As far as he could tell, the strengths of the two seemed roughly equal. However, the girl was being pushed around.

The disparity was probably because of the difference in their awareness of the surroundings. The hydra was only thinking of knocking down his opponent. On the other hand, the Night-colored girl was restraining her strength to prevent damage to their surroundings.

Xins, who was watching, had his hands full blocking the attacks directed at the girl from the side. He had no time to go on the offensive with a First Scale Recitation (High Noble Aria). His catalyst was also running out.

"Is this the last Recitation……?"

Five jewels rolled in his palm. Five colors, a bit of every Recitation. Should he call out five small spirits with a Second Scale Recitation (Noble Aria) and go on the offensive? Or should he respond like before by defending against the hydra's attacks? These weren't the best options, but the only two left after eliminating all the other choices.

That's right, he had to pick one of these options.

It should be like that, but why did he feel a sense of loathing……?

He held onto the five gems, not letting go. Somewhere, a part of himself stubbornly refused.

—I still haven't seen your Recitation yet—

The girl's words repeated over and over in his mind.

Your Recitation. Your……

What is my Recitation?

No…… Deep down, he understood. Even he himself knew. He was the Reciter able to use all five colors. If a master Reciter of each color assembled here, there wouldn't be much difference.

That would be different from "Xins Airwincle's Recitation".

'Xins, let's keep working hard. We can't give up at the very end.'

In these ten years, Enne's heart had become stronger.

'After seeing Kluele-san's Recitation today…… I thought that I should reconsider a bit…… Kluele-san seemed to be having so much fun. Therefore, I thought that I also want to have fun while Reciting.'

The young Reciter reconsidered his way of life.

The Night-colored girl was like that. After throwing away everything, she ended up here.

How was he compared to her? Does the fact that he was still the same as before, mean that he hadn't advanced since that time?

……Could I be the one who was hiding in my shell all this time?

In the setting sun, the place was illuminated by the spotlight from the recital— He searched for the scenery of an unchanging school.

He had continued to deceive himself that he hadn't changed, relying on his memories of the past.

……Admit it already. The times that he remembered won't come back. Accept it. Time won't flow backwards.

"Evhemary, I might not be the Xins you know anymore."

He couldn't discard his memories of the past. But even so, he had to change.

If that hydra could use five colors at once in its excitement, he should be able to do it as well. That venomous thing was only haphazardly mixing the five colors together.

That day, at that time. The Rainbow Color he had promised Evhemary wasn't something like that.

His oath hadn't been fulfilled yet. I still haven't shown you the true Rainbow Color Recitations.

—Idiot. You were so late to realize it—

The wind carried along the girl's voice. In this battle that was frozen at a stalemate, being distracted for a

single instant could be fatal. But even so— even though the opponent was an unprecedented monster, the promised girl looked only at him.

Now, what to Recite?

He asked himself. Hesitation was unforgivable. He understood that there would be no return if he stumbled into the maze of hesitation a second time. Can I really do it? Will what I Recite really overcome this situation? His self of the past questioned him.

—But it's alright now…… The me of right now is able to cast aside everything.

He closed his eyes. He didn't need a Song of Praise Oratorio. What he was Reciting was himself. A mirror that reflected his true self. It took the form of his inner thoughts. It will be fine if I call out that.

—That's right, he finally understood what was truly important. He had remembered.

A ring of light formed in his right hand. Closing his eyelids, he could feel on his pupils the radiance growing in his right hand. Rainbow-colored sparkles. Brighter than starlight, more elegant than moonlight.

The gemstones fell from his hand, and he felt something Rainbow-colored be born in his right hand.

"Evhemary!"

In response to Xins's shout, the <Woman of Origin> snapped the fingers of her right hand.

Underneath the monster's feet, the hydra's own shadow entwined itself around the real body. It wasn't an offensive or defensive maneuver, but simply for restraining. The hydra tried to slip out, but the five necks were all tightly bound. Although they had been struggling until now, the spell did not break.

The True Spirit of Night and the five-headed monster were equally powerful. But if her opponent's movements were sealed, but if there was no need to worry about damaging their surroundings, the girl could also fight with all of her strength.

"……Or perhaps the one who called you out was me."

In the very beginning. The first thing was that he had touched the <Egg> located in this school.

Unleashing five colors at the same time— the hydra in which five colors independently existed.

In other words, it was the false “Rainbow Color” he had boasted about in the past.

—That is why I won’t hesitate anymore.

Aiming at the monster before his eyes, Xins threw the gems he was gripping in his right hand.

It was simply a rapid stream of light, without shape or form. A light shining with the seven colors of the rainbow. All of the colors equally and harmoniously mixed together, into a color in a different dimension from the five Recitation Colors.

The flow of light was like a spear that pierced the hydra. The spear shot through the hydra’s body and flew out into the jet-black night. In the instant when it penetrated the infinitely wide black sea.

Black clouds split apart, giving rise to a radiance like the birth of a new world.

The whole world was enveloped in a flood of light, rainbow light that seemed to spread like what was foretold in the gospel—

Around the world, everyone closed their eyes at the dazzling light. It wasn't simply because of the brightness. Everyone who saw the radiance realized that it wasn't a blessing for them.

The light was only truly illuminating a single person.

It was for the sake of a girl who hadn't basked in the sun even once.

"……Thank you."

Only one person in the world, the Night-colored girl, continued to gaze at the light for eternity.

Part 4

"……Is it over?"

When the radiance had finally ended, Kluele timidly opened her eyes.

The monster (hydra)'s figure had disappeared, as if it had never existed in the first place.

[It seems that it was skillfully sent back. Because it was originally an irregular existence, we shouldn't worry about what happened to it afterward.]

Because the crisis was over for now, Kluele breathed out in relief, and turned her eyes to the boy who had fallen asleep with his back leaning against the railings on the roof. Although there had been such a commotion, he had a peaceful look on his face.

"And so, you should turn small as well. It's tiring to have to look up at you."

[It's too troublesome. I'm fine staying like this.]

"Staying like this……"

After it had become dawn, support troops had come. If he continued to stay this enormous, he would undoubtedly cause a fuss.

[It's fine. Before they catch a glimpse of me, I will have also disappeared.]

Disappear? No way, you—

She received no response. Keeping his mouth shut, Arma averted his eyes. More than anything, that gesture confirmed her premonition. ……Well, it can't be helped.

"Fine. But I'll stay with you until then."

[……Don't expect any thanks from me.]

As if he was embarrassed, the True Spirit of Night turned his head away as he said that.

Gradually, the starlight in the eastern sky was concealed by the bright sun.

On the roof of the first-year school building.

Although she had come many times before, it was her first time spending the night here.

[It's almost time……]

The lizard resting on her knees muttered. Before the sky had brightened, the Recited creature had already returned to the size that Kluele was used to.

“Is this farewell?”

[When a True Spirit completes its goal, it disappears. Even I have to follow such a rule.]

From the way he spoke, Kluele realized. This Recited creature had surely chosen to leave Neight of his own free will.

“Do you have anything you want to convey to Neight?”

[I have nothing that I want to convey. Although there are things I want to say, I can’t say them now.]

“I see.”

[I didn’t expect you to accept it that easily.]

Since Arma seemed to be playing dumb, Kluele replied in an ambiguous tone of voice.

“I just somehow understood.”

[……Well, that's how it is.]

Seeming embarrassed, he flapped his wings as if he was escaping.

"Hey, you Night-colored flying lizard."

[……That again, even at the very end?]

Stopping the movement of his wings, the lizard that was called turned around. At his amazed voice, Kluele winked.

"Like that, you won't forget me, right? The girl who called you a lizard until the very end."

After a second of silence.

[What a clever idea. But there's no meaning to it.]

Flapping his wings, his body rose into the air.

[Even without such a thing…… I won't forget you.]

Leaving behind those words, the Night-colored Recited creature flew away.

***

“I wanted to talk with you for a bit longer…”

On the roof of the fourth-year school building, a coat flapped in the wind.

“I’m only accompanying you because it’s our reunion after so many days. Don’t you think that if we were to meet every day, there would be nothing to talk about?”

You’re still saying that even at the very end? Raising the collar of his coat, Xins secretly smiled.

“Even like that, I think we wouldn’t run out of topics to talk about.”

“Wouldn’t we?”

Gazing at the sun rising above the horizon, the shadow in the figure of a girl tilted its head.

For a little while, there was silence. Although they were about to part, he couldn’t find any words to say.

The sound of someone's flapping wings broke the silence.

"Arma."

The Night-colored lizard landed on the shoulder of the same-colored girl.

"Thanks, for a variety of things."

[It wasn't much. Anyways, it's about time.]

After those words, the lizard's figure was the first to disappear.

In the sunlight, the figure of the shadow-colored girl was the next to fade.

Even though it was the very end, the girl's mouth was firmly shut. Why was she……

—I see.

Xins finally understood the girl's intentions. She was waiting. Waiting for him to speak first.

……Really, you have such a bad habit. But it was also the same back then. In the classroom at twilight, when we made the promise, I was always the one speaking.

"Hey, Evhemary."

Silently, the girl waited for him to continue.

"I wonder if we'll see each other again."

"Someday, when Neight becomes capable of using First Scale Recitations."

Gradually, the girl's figure faded away. It melted in the sunlight, becoming faint. Both of her hands disappeared, the lower half of her body disappeared, and in the last moment before her whole body disappeared, the girl spoke teasingly.

"But I don't know. Let's think of this time as getting lucky. His one in a hundred chance came during the first time, that's all. This may be the first and last time."

The morning glow signifying the start of a new day approached.

She teased him even until the end. Before he could reply, the True Spirit that should have been before his eyes seemed to have completely faded.

But instead.

“I wonder why? Maybe I just want to tease you.”

The shadow-colored True Spirit disappeared, and there stood a girl with the same figure and voice; a girl who hadn't changed at all since that time.

There stood the girl who had been crying in the classroom at that time.

The girl he remembered.

The one difference was— the girl here right now was smiling.

"……Evhemary!"

"Bye bye, Xins. ……I'm sorry, I couldn't say it even at the very end. I lo—"

The dawn shone behind her back. The girl tried to speak her last words.

Along with her words, she reached out her hands as if seeking for an embrace—

But— their bodies did not meet.

Before that, the girl became particles of the dawn's light and faded away.

"……I don't mind."

Looking up at the sky, Xins hummed to himself. I don't mind. I don't need a goodbye.

"Because I will surely meet you again somewhere."

The Rainbow Color Reciter looked at the place where the girl had stood.

Forever and ever, he hummed a Rainbow-colored song without lyrics or a melody.

He hoped that it would reach the girl who was somewhere far away.

Awarded Play: Dawn-Colored Song User

The school after a few days.

Looking out the window, the scenery still retained painful-looking scars from the events of a few days ago.

On the morning of the next day after that incident, in the basement of the resources center that should have been forbidden to enter, the finding of a student who had lost consciousness resolved the situation.

The student seemed to confess to the majority of the incident, and was now transferred to a criminal institution and receiving a formal interrogation. Thanks to the leadership of the Rainbow Color Reciter and the efforts of every teacher, the fact that there were no deaths was a piece of good luck among the misfortune.

"……But, that isn't really something to smile at."

Although there were no casualties, the one among the injured who most resembled the dead was herself.

Her left shoulder was very tightly wrapped in a bandage to the point of feeling uncomfortable. Touching the rock-solid knot with the fingertips of her right hand,

Kluele heaved a large sigh. ……Really, how troublesome. Although the long-awaited summer vacation would start tomorrow, with this injury, she couldn't play around.

The school seemed like it would use the long summer vacation to do repairs. Because of that, summer vacation began slightly earlier. Today was the last day before summer break that they needed to attend school, and was the closing ceremony.

"Kluele, good morning. You're early today. What happened to morning practice?"

The tanned girl poked at the bandage.

"……Are you serious?"

"No, just saying."

With a laugh, Ada jokingly ran away. The surprising thing was, like her other classmates, she didn't receive much of a shock from the incident. Well, most of the students had immediately taken refuge in the first-year school building, so that could be the reason.

"Kluele, long time no see!"

“’Morning, Mio.”

It seemed that this girl hadn’t changed either.

“That’s right, listen! My dress from that time, when I went home and looked at it, there was a really huge hole in the knee. And even though I’d only worn it once…”

“As for me, my dress got stained with blood. …… Want to see?”

“Um…… No, I don’t need to see.”

Mio, who had unwisely imagined it, grimaced. But although the idle chatting had ended, the girl suddenly peered at Kluele’s face.

“—By the way, Kluele.”

“What is it? You seem so serious…”

“Although I was on the rooftop at that time, it was amazing. I saw the Divine Bird (Phoenix) of Dawn!”

“……Ehh. Isn't that great for you then."

Although she tried to respond as calmly as she could, Kluele couldn't help but avert her face.

"I mean, listen. That time, there was even a girl riding on it!"

"It was amazing, was it? I wish I'd seen it too."

Imperceptibly, an evil look appeared in the girl's eyes.

"……And, there was a bandage wrapped around that girl's left shoulder."

"Bandage? Maybe she was also injured?"

"She wore a white dress—"

"Mine was stained with blood, so it wasn't white."

"……I see."

Noisily getting up from her chair, Mio smiled evilly while looking down.

"Kluele-san, do you insist on playing dumb?"

"What do you mean?"

That seemed to be the limit. Suddenly, Mio grabbed Kluele's uniform and shook her back and forth.

"Wa-Wait! I'm still injured……"

"Aaah, that's enough, stop it! Confess everything! What happened?!"

"W-Well, let's talk later when I have more time."

Seizing the opportunity, Kluele stood up from her seat. If the clock in the classroom was right, there were still ten minutes until the closing ceremony would start.

"Ah, where are you running away to!"

"I have some things to do. If I don't hurry, I won't make it in time for the closing ceremony."

Carrying a paper bag in her right hand, Kluele sneaked out of the classroom.

She went from the third floor to the fourth floor. From the fourth floor, the stairs leading up were barricaded by a rope with a sign hanging from it that prohibited entry. Because the railings of the rooftop had been damaged,

students were prohibited from entering until it had been fixed.

Ducking under the rope, Kluele went up to the roof. She opened the door leading to the rooftop. Just when she opened the door, the rising sun blinded her. She shaded her eyes with a hand to dim the sun's light and walked slowly along the roof.

"Like I thought, you're here."

"……Kluele-san?"

The short boy with a still young-looking face gazed up at the sky with an empty look.

"Only your bag was in the class, so I wondered where you were."

"I just…… wanted to be lost in thought for a moment."

"Thinking about something?"

"—Perhaps."

Once again, the boy looked up at the sky.

"When I wake up, I don't use an alarm clock. Arma doesn't sleep, so he wakes me up every day…… But yesterday and the day before yesterday, Arma, who should have always been by my side, wasn't there…… Kluele-san…… Did Arma really disappear?"

That voice sounded hoarse, and at the same time, like it was crying.

"That's right. Arma and the True Spirit you called out, both went back."

Still with the posture of looking up at the sky, Neight closed his eyes.

After the True Spirit had completed its duty, it had disappeared. This young Reciter should have also known this. He had made the choice after acknowledging the fact. But it was still unbearable. It was so painful that it felt like his thoughts would tear apart his chest.

"I have nothing that I want to convey. Although there are things I want to say, I can't say them now."

At her quick speech, the boy before her opened his eyes, surprised.

"……Eh?"

"It's a message from that lizard, addressed to you."

"—Is there anything else?"

"Nope. That's all."

The dancing breeze overhead caused the unmoving Neight's hair to sway.

"Do you get the meaning?"

With a completely confused face, the boy shook his head from side to side. Now then, what should she say? She thought about it for a few seconds. Instead of telling him the answer, Kluele held out the paper bag that had been waiting in her right hand.

"I'll give this to you."

"Eh…… T-To me?"

"There's nobody else here but you."

With a small smile, she forcefully placed the paper bag into the hands of her companion who acted as reserved as always.

You can open it, her gaze encouraged. From within the bag, the boy took out a cloak. At first glance it looked like a coat with a hood, but made to be looser.

“This— Is it a robe?!”

“It’s a present. Because your robe had become fairly dirty.”

A little bit of radiance returned to the grieving boy’s eyes.

“Thank you very much! ……Although it’s quite extravagant, isn’t it?”

It was a white-blue color. Kluele had chosen a pale blue color reminiscent of the dawn sky. Its vividness couldn’t be compared to the deep blue one he wore right now.

“Something this much is fine.”

Sure enough, the boy seemed embarrassed to suddenly wear something of this color. But there was a reason why she chose this.

“Night Color Recitations are naturally a dark color, so I think wearing a refreshing color makes a pretty contrast — When someday, that Night-colored flying lizard rides on your shoulder again.”

“……Eh?”

Shocked, with the robe still waiting in his hands, Neight let out a sigh. Leaning her back against the railing , Kluele gently brushed Neight’s forehead with her fingertips.

“Although there are things I want to say, I can’t say them now. That was his message, right? In that case, you should call out that lizard again and listen to the things he wanted to say. If you don’t, you can’t help but be worried.”

“I should call out Arma….. again……?”

Slowly, as if like a baby, the boy repeated her words.

"The one who first called that guy out was your mother, right? This time, you should call him out yourself."

The things that he wanted to say were as much as a mountain, and he couldn't rely on people to pass on all those messages.

Therefore, for the sake of allowing him to say them, he would be called out once again.

'The truth is, I just want to see him again', but that perverse lizard would never directly say such a thing.

As evidence, that Night-colored flying lizard didn't say anything similar to "goodbye" even until the very end.

"—Kluele-san, may I try this on?"

He put on the dawn-colored robe over his uniform. Although it was his first time wearing it, he felt a familiar

feeling like he had worn the robe for many years already. With regards to both the material and the color, what a wonderful robe it was.

"Yeah. Not too bad. It suits you!"

At the moment when he wanted to express his gratitude once again to the girl who sounded satisfied.

—It's still slightly too big for you—

Was that a trick of the wind?

It was a voice that sounded like it was teasing, but was also familiar.

"……What's wrong?"

"N-No, it's nothing."

Excitedly, Neight waved his hand. It seemed that only he had heard it.

Suddenly. This time it was real; the clear sound of the bell rang out. It was time for homeroom to start. In today ’s case, it was a bell signaling the start of the closing ceremony.

“Well, let’s go, Neight.”

After saying that, the girl walked in the direction of the stairs. Nodding, Neight followed after her.

I see. That’s right.

Wait for me.

Wait for me, Arma. And you too, Mother.

Someday, definitely someday.

I will meet you two again.

“Hurry up, Neight, hurry up. The closing ceremony will start soon!”

The girl who descended the stairs one step in front of him raised her voice.

"Ah, I'm coming!"

Without looking back, Neight ran down from the roof.

It's okay to not look back, right?

Because I will definitely meet you again!

On the empty rooftop.

—Arma, what's wrong? You have a displeased look in your eyes—

—That little girl……—

—What's wrong with Kluele-san? —

—My name certainly isn't 'that Night-colored flying lizard'……—

That faint murmur was not heard by anyone.

However, it was certainly carried over by the dawn-colored wind.

Afterword

Afterword by Sazane Kei

No matter how closely you look at it, I seem like I'm showing off my tone of voice (singing a story). Has it already been four years since I took on this pen name and started submitting my works?[8] I've thought up many stories during this time, and the fact that I can show everyone a work like this— Once again it makes me feel the meaning and mysterious power behind my name.

Nice to meet you, my name is Sazane Kei. Thank you very much for reading my work 'Evhe Smiles at Dawn'.

Was it boring or interesting? Unsatisfactory or satisfying? I think there will be a variety of thoughts from everyone who has read it.

It reminds me of books and music.

I sometimes think there is nothing that divides people's interests as much as those two. A friend may not be able to appreciate the music I like and I may not be able to appreciate the books that my friend recommends me.

Everyone has probably experienced that at least once. (For me who is very picky, that is sadly an everyday occurrence.)

There isn't an ultimate music that will be praised by everyone, nor is there an ultimate book. But because of that, there can be as many new books and pieces of music created as the number of people in this world. That's how I feel.

……That's right, there is surely no work that can be accepted by every single person. After all, everyone perceives things differently and this difference is what makes things amazing.

But even while I think like that—

I hope that this work can bring pleasure to many people, or even one person— The fact that I wish for this from the bottom of my heart is also an honest truth. 'I'm glad I read this book.' To this day, it's been my dream to make someone think that.

And in the process of heading towards that dream, I have been supported by a great number of people.

Those who read over my rough draft. Everyone in the Fujimi editorial department who allowed my work to enter the final round.[9] And finally, the judges who chose my work as the honorable mention in the final round.

When I was revising the manuscript after winning the award, I was truly supported by the leader of the editorial department, K-sama, as well as everyone else in it.

Furthermore, Takeoka Miho-sama decorated my work with beautiful and delicate illustrations.

Also, there are a great number of people who supported me.

My friends and acquaintances from when I was a student. Those who visited my blog and homepage before this book was published. My colleagues who looked forward to the book. The other people who I got to know through the internet and my group of amazing online friends across all of Japan.

[k.k], who read over ‘Evhe Smiles at Dawn’ before it was submitted and gave valuable feedback. Moreover,

websites about how to write a novel and the two main sites that helped me.

My family and relatives who were more surprised than anyone that I had won the prize. They have forever and ever supported me with the most basic things like regular meals and my day to day life.

To all of you— Thank you very much.

And most of all, thank you to you who are reading this .

I'm grateful for our encounter. I sincerely hope this isn't just a chance encounter that will quickly end, but that we can meet again.

Now, let me change the subject slightly……

This work, 'Evhe Smiles at Dawn', is part of a series named 'Tasogare-iro no Uta Tsukai'. Twilight-colored Song User[10]— I think there are people who think this person is Neight and there are those who think it is Evhemary. There are probably also people who think that it refers to both of them.

For Neight, there is Kluele, Mio, and other classmates from school. Also, there is Arma.

For Evhemary, there is Xins and her friends from school back then.

Each has their own comrades and their own story. They are all connected and will eventually turn into a single story. While dreaming of that, I will do the best I can right now.

And at the end of this story's journey, I pray……

Even if it's just one character

Even if it's just one <Song word of Praise>

Even if it's just one scene

I pray that something will remain in your heart.

And so, while hoping that we can meet again in the near future—

Thank you very much for reading this work.

On a certain day in November, on a night when the winter wind began to blow

Sazane Kei

Commentary by Fujimi Fantasia Bunko Editorial Department

The creation of Night Color Recitations which was said to be impossible to complete, and the master of all five Recitation Colors.

Exchanging promises to mutually fulfill their dreams that everyone had laughed at and called a fantasy, the girl Evhemary and the boy Xins walked down their respective paths. And after time passed, Neight, who carried on Evhemary's will, met the girl who studied Red Color Recitations, Kluele, at a Recitation School—.

How was "Tasogare-iro no Uta Tsukai – Evhe Smiles at Dawn", which won the honorable mention award in

the eighteenth Fantasia novel competition? This story, which began from a promise in the past, is filled with a variety of wishes and troubles.

The girl who attempted to leave behind proof of her existence and the boy who searched for his own path— Through the four main characters, a story is told about the joy and happiness of having a shared dream, as well as the true difficulties of advancing towards it.

That is also a familiar feeling for we who were born into the real world. Even though this work takes place in a fantasy world, the same worries and anxieties that we face regularly are also genuinely felt by Neight and his friends.

However, without being discouraged by the difficulties, they earnestly advance forward in order to fulfill their “dream” known as Recitations.

Recitations— a fascinating summoning technique that is an important feature in this work. That is, the art of calling forth something by using a catalyst of the same color, and then singing praise to that name. Although Recitations were accepted by the editors, it is actually a word daringly made up by the author. The Recitation

scene that we were concerned about is finally completed, revealing the wishes of Neight and his friends while combining fragility and beauty.

We sympathize with them as they advance, believing in their choices while being fascinated by the brilliance of Recitations— That is the charm of the work and the author, Sazane Kei. I certainly believe in the mysterious sense of sadness that we can connect to and the purely wonderful feeling of satisfaction we get after reading this novel.

Furthermore, for summarizing this work, the illustrator Takeoka Miho's existence was essential. The process of turning the clear mood of the world in the novel and the Recitation "songs" into illustrations was extraordinary enough to make even the lead editor's heart pound.

Neight and Kluele met in this book and made an appearance to the readers. Out of all the readers, there seem to be many who still want to talk longer with us after this episode. If you like this story, please share your thoughts with us before the next volume! That will support the author more than anything and become her driving force to expand this story world even farther.

〒102-8144

Tokyo prefecture, Chiyoda ward, Fujimi 1-12-14

Fujimi Shobo, Fujimi Fantasia Bunko editorial department

Sazane Kei-sama

Takeoka Miho-sama

We look forward to your support!

References

1. ↑ Arma's way of talking: Arma refers to himself using a formal word for "I" that makes him sound old and wise (我). He calls Kluele and Mio by the more derogatory term "little girl" ().
2. ↑ Manticore: a legendary creature with the body of a red lion. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manticore
3. ↑ Meaning that if it was the catalyst who conducted the Recitation instead of the person, then the person has no right to call herself a Reciter.
4. ↑ Quetzalcoatl – Literally a "green-winged snake" (緑). It is a Mesoamerican deity also known as a feathered serpent, often depicted as a snake with feathered wings. See link
5. ↑ Hydra – A mythical nine-headed serpent. See link
6. ↑ Chimera – A creature in Greek mythology with the head and body of a lioness, a goat's head growing out of its back, and a tail that ended in a snake's head. See link
7. ↑ "Woman of origin" refers to how Evhe was the woman who created Night Color Recitations, and is also a link to the bible in which the first woman created by God (and thus the origin of all other humans) was named 'Eve'.

8. ↑ 細 means 'thin/narrow/small' (used in this case in meaning ‘small/modest’ which I translated as ‘ closely’ to make it sound more fluent in English), means ‘sound/noise’ (used in this case as meaning ‘ tone of voice’ (literally ‘sound color’)) and means ‘ enlighten/inform/open’ (which I translated as ‘ showing off’). By putting the three kanji together, is the author’s name, Sazane Kei.
9. ↑ ’Evhe Smiles at Dawn’ was entered in the 18th Fantasia Novel Award.
10. ↑ ’Tasogare-iro no Uta Tsukai’ translates to ‘ Twilight-colored Song User’.